TRANSFORMATIVE DISCIPLESHIP PRACTICES: BRIDGING THEORETICAL KNOWLEDGE OF GOD TO EXPERIENTIAL KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

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ABSTRACT

TRANSFORMATIVE DISCIPLESHIP PRACTICES: BRIDGING THEORETICAL KNOWLEDGE OF GOD TO EXPERIENTIAL KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

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The ministry context is located at Lindenwald Community Church in Hamilton, Ohio. A key problem identified is that congregants settle for knowing about God instead of knowing him personally. The hypothesis is if a person engages in a six-week transformative discipleship process, participants will move from a theoretical knowledge of God to an experiential knowledge of God. This project employs a mixed methods research approach. It is mostly qualitative, utilizing grounded theory and phenomenological design. Data was collected using pre- and post-questionnaires, journal entries, interviews, and focus groups to evaluate the results of the discipleship process.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project would not have been possible if it were not for my Spirit-filled seminary experience at Untied Theological Seminary for my Master of Divinity degree and doctoral program. I am thankful for many of the professors and faculty who made an impact on my spiritual life. I am grateful for Dr. David Watson. Dr. Watson opened new pathways of understanding the Holy Spirit and the presence of God for me. Dr. Watson introduced me to Global Awakening and Dr. Randy Clark. A special thank you to Dr. Clark who is an anointed man of God and a humble servant in God's kingdom. I have had the privilege of receiving teaching, prayer, and impartation from Dr. Clark, which has deeply shaped my identity in Christ. It has been an honor to be a Randy Clark Scholar in the Doctoral program. I am grateful for Dr. Peter Bellini, professor at United Theological Seminary. Dr. Bellini gave me a framework and foundation for the work of the Holy Spirit. He continues to be a spiritual mentor and an encourager in the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, my late father, Jim White, and my mother, Sue White. My parents gave me a foundation of faith and family. My mom modeled love, care, patience, and perseverance. She helped me find my voice and has been a constant encouragement to me throughout my life. My Dad was an inspiration to me and taught me how to have self-confidence, be a leader, and value others. I am the person I am today because of the influence of both of my parents. I know he would be proud of my pursuit of higher education and my ministry.

This is also dedicated to my fellow Methodists who have a desire to know God more intimately. I pray that the research and the contents of my thesis would continue to bear fruit and that others would experience God in meaningful ways. John Wesley experienced the powerful move of God in his life and ministry. This same power is available today. There is more, and I pray for a great awakening in the Methodist church.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AME	African Methodist Episcopal
BA	Bachelor of Arts
NIV	New International Version
OCD	Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder
UMC	United Methodist Church
UTS	United Theological Seminary
VOA	Voice of the Apostles

INTRODUCTION

This introduction examines how each of the foundation chapters impacted the implementation of the project, "Transformative Discipleship Practices: Bridging Theoretical Knowledge of God to Experiential Knowledge of God." The foundations chapters provided the substantiated necessity of the project and its approach. The emphasis of this project was the hypothesis that "if people are led through a six-week focused discipleship process, they will have an increased experiential knowledge of God." Based on the analysis of the biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary research it was apparent that a person can have an increased experiential knowledge of God. The foundations chapters served as a sustaining groundwork that provided Scriptural truths,[1] historical data, theological understanding, and modern scientific discovery that helped participants experience God in new ways of understanding. The outcome demonstrated that the participants experienced God and drew closer to him.

Biblical Foundations

The biblical foundation for the project is rooted in the book of Ephesians, which embodies many spiritual transformation principles critical to experiential knowledge of God. The research of this foundations chapter focused on Ephesians 1:17–19 as the

[1] Out of respect for the Bible, I have chosen to capitalize all referent terms (Scripture), in whole or in part, to the Bible.

supporting passage for the project. Ephesus was a rich city, but poor in their understanding of personal relationship with God. The Apostle Paul wanted them to know God by experiencing different kinds of riches than those with which they had been satisfying themselves. He wrote a Spirit-inspired letter that included a prayer to stir the hearts and minds of its readers, both then and now.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul's greatest desire was for them to understand the great riches they had in Christ. He prayed for spiritual wisdom, for God to give them the Spirit of wisdom and revelation to know God more deeply and intimately. He also prayed for the eyes of their hearts to be enlightened to know the hope to which they were called and the great power that was available for those who believe. The exegesis will show that the word "hope" can be understood as an assurance of the future. It will further show that the Greek word for power, *dunamis,* is understood as dynamite or energy. This spiritual awareness that includes assurances of hope of a current and eternal relationship with God and empowerment to enter an experiential spiritual reality with God is the highest knowledge possible.

For Christians, abstract biblical knowledge is not enough to satisfy the biblical concept of salvation, which is highly relational and experiential. Many Christians settle for information and miss out on spiritual transformation. When biblical knowledge is understood through a new spiritual experiential awareness, the heart is enlightened, and revelation occurs. Providing new transformative discipleship practices will help participants grow in their experiential relationship with God.

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, wrestled with his sense of assurance that he was saved, and he had a deep hunger for more of God. It was through his Aldersgate

and Fetter Lane Society experiences that he gained a new spiritual awareness of his relationship with God, as these transformative experiences were experiential in the knowledge of God. As such, Wesley's life was a key focal point for the historical foundation.

Historical Foundations

The historical research is centered around the transformative spiritual experiences of John Wesley. The historical analysis informed the hypothesis by exploring John Wesley's spiritual encounters with God that transformed his theoretical knowledge of God into an experiential knowledge of God. This research informed the participants of the significant spiritual events in the life of the founder of the early Methodist movement that would later birth several denominations. The research revealed Wesley's spiritual transformation.

John Wesley was raised in a Christian home. His father was a pastor, and his mother was deeply devoted to prayer. Being raised in a Christian home and the church, Wesley knew about God, but wrestled with his faith and assurance of his salvation. This wrestling would continue into his adulthood. It was not until his Aldersgate experience that he felt the presence of the Holy Spirit.

In May 1738, he went unwillingly to Aldersgate Street, to a meeting. Despite his disaffected manner, when he heard a reading of Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans, he felt the Holy Spirit. He described the relationship encounter as his heart feeling strangely warmed. He experienced a new trust in Christ for salvation and an assurance that God had taken away his sins and saved him from sin and death.

Yet, it was his later Fetter Lane Society experience on New Year's Day 1739, that radically transformed his relationship with God in terms of empowerment for ministry. He gathered with others at the Fetter Lane Society. There, he was touched and transformed by the power and presence of God. Those gathered at Fetter Lane worshiped and prayed into the early hours of the morning on January 1, 1739, and as they continued to be steadfast in prayer the power of God came mightily on Wesley and the others; many cried out for joy and fell to the ground. They were amazed at the presence of God and broke out in songs of worship. Wesley's testimony is an encouragement and a testament to the relational power and presence of God. It reveals the person of the Holy Spirit and how the Spirit works in the heart and mind of a believer.

Wesley's experience exemplifies what can happen in a transformational sense when the Holy Spirit meets the human spirit in experiential ways. He first had his heart strangely warmed by the Spirit (a filial experience) and was then empowered for mission by the Spirit (a power filled or energizing experience). These are different and yet critical experiences of the Spirit that move one from knowing about God (abstract) to knowing God (subjective/relational). The theological foundation probes these dynamics.

Theological Foundations

The theological research revolves around the study of pneumatology and the work of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who enlightens hearts and imparts wisdom and revelation. This was true in apostle Paul's writing to the Ephesians and the life of John Wesley. The project provided experiential opportunities for participants to gain

knowledge through transformative discipleship practices rooted in the theology of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the third member of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is often referred to as a counselor or a comforter, describing some of the relational ways he expresses himself. The Holy Spirit works in, around, and through the lives of believers. With this said, many Christians grapple with understanding the dynamic relational nature of the Holy Trinity and in particular the Holy Spirit. As a result, they miss out on experiencing the Holy Spirit and thus entering a relational and experiential knowledge of God.

As will be explained in the theological chapter, pneumatology is formed from two Greek words, *pneuma,* and *logos*. *Pneuma* is understood as wind, breath, or Spirit. *Logos* means word, matter, or thing. Pneumatology refers to the study of the biblical doctrine of the Holy Spirit, including the nature of the Spirit, the deity of the Spirit, and the work of the Spirit throughout the Scripture as a dynamic free-willing presence (*pneuma*) and as an imparter of revelational knowledge of God and his Kingdom (*logos*).

The Holy Spirit was introduced in Genesis, revealing that the Spirit hovered over the face of the waters. The Holy Spirit has subtle references throughout the Old Testament but makes a dynamic entrance at Pentecost. The Holy Spirit came powerfully after Jesus ascended. What appeared to be tongues on fire came and rested on believers, as they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues. He made Pentecost a dynamic relational and experiential event.

This same Holy Spirit is active and present in the life of all believers. The manifest presence of the Holy Spirit can be experienced both individually and through a

community of believers. God desires to be in a relationship with believers—for a believer to know him and experience his goodness through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit works in the life of a believer for renewal and transformation and to strengthen a believer for the work of ministry. It is through the Holy Spirit's revelation and affective encounters that hearts are enlightened and thoughts are transformed. The brain can be transformed and create new neuropathways that foster new thoughts and thought processes leading to life transformation. This process involves the science of neuroplasticity, the subject of the interdisciplinary chapter.

Interdisciplinary Foundations

The topic of the interdisciplinary research is focused on neuroplasticity. It informed the project by providing data and personal testimonies of how the brain can be rewired. Sometimes the rewiring of the brain leads to new understandings. As experiences of God's presence and power happen, they can precipitate new neurological development, which is a key component of spiritual transformation resulting in new relational knowledge of God. The reality of and framework for neuroplasticity was initially discovered as researchers worked with stroke victims to help them regain physical abilities that were once lost due to brain damage.

Neuroplasticity, as a science, deals with the brain's ability to change and adapt. The study of neuroplasticity reveals that the mind can influence the brain on a neuro-chemical level. Whereas it was once believed that the brain was static and unable to change, neuroscience has proven that the brain can produce new neurons and make new

connections. Neuroplasticity defines the way the brain's nerve cells, known as neurons, change their structures and connections with each other as a response to different stimuli.

The science of neuroplasticity shows that humans have the capability to create new neuro pathways of thinking, thus opening the mind to the power and presence of God. Though some are skeptical about the relationship between science and religion, there is evidence of the impact of religious practices on the brain. Consistent involvement in religious practices has the power to heal, renew, and change the brain, which in turn addresses some of the skepticism surrounding the interplay between science and religion. As the interdisciplinary chapter will show, researchers believe that frequently engaging in Scripture meditation and reflection has the ability to change a person's inner reality or core beliefs. It is believed that the mind will take what is contemplated upon as authentic, even if it differs from what is perceived in the world. This results in the mind influencing the brain, thus changing its structure in response to a person's experience. When a person lives by what they meditate upon it becomes a core belief. Scripture meditation has the power and ability to bring about a transformational change of core beliefs in one's heart. The phrase "changing one's mind" is truly possible using insights gained from the science of neuroplasticity.

A personal commitment to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is something that occurs in the mind to declare a decision. It is a literal change of one's mind from one way of thinking to another. It is a decision of both the head and the heart precipitated by new thoughts introduced by various means of grace, through the action of the Holy Spirit, that leads to new neural pathways that are not merely cognitive, but also experiential. God desires to open hearts and minds to experience him, to meet believers in

transformative experiences, both at conversion and throughout the relational journey, and to expand the mind to shift from theoretical knowledge to experiential knowledge of God.

Project Application

The project drew upon each of the foundational areas to provide pathways to a new understanding of God. The emphasis of this project was the hypothesis that if people are led through a six-week focused discipleship process, they will have an increased experiential knowledge of God. The biblical foundation of Ephesians 1:17–19 was used as a foundational model of spiritual transformation. The historical contexts of John Wesley's two key encounters with God were utilized in forming the content of the project by incorporating insights gained from his Aldersgate and Fetter Lane Society experiences. The theological foundational concept of the Holy Spirit presented dynamics that were sought after, as the project incorporated times of prayer and invitation of the Holy Spirit. The principle of the personal nature of the Holy Spirit was taught and presented with a met expectation of encounters during the prayer time.

Since neuroplasticity was a key conceptual framework, the project was built precept on precept with the encouragement that posturing for a new revelation of God could change neural structures, a critical component of the overall mind that ingrafts new information for enduring change. The teaching, prayer, and journaling components revealed that participants gained a new awareness and new experiential knowledge of God through different stimuli and experiential frameworks that were introduced.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

I grew up in the United Methodist Church and knew about God, but did not personally know God. As I grew older, I developed a curiosity and a hunger to truly know God. It was scary and exciting. As I reflect on what drove me years ago, it was having a sense of assurance of my salvation. I had an Aldersgate moment similar to John Wesley when his "heart was strangely warmed," and I felt the assurance of my salvation. My experience occurred during a retreat weekend called Walk to Emmaus. My Emmaus experience was life changing, but I still found myself desiring more of God. The many years that followed included intense Bible study, participation in small groups, and an invitation to join the church staff as the Director of Adult Ministry. I had oversight and led a thriving small group ministry, offered a variety of educational classes, and started interest groups. There was a great sense of community and belonging, yet there was no depth. I heard about God, read about God, but never knew him. My heart was touched by the love of God and power of the Holy Spirit, but deep in my soul I knew there was more—I just didn't know how to access it. As the psalmist says, "As the deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God."[1]

[1] Psalm 42:1, New International Version (NIV). All Scripture references will be quoted from the Life Application Study Bible NIV unless otherwise noted.

Over the past twenty years, God has been equipping and preparing me to lead his people into a deeper relationship with him. I have strong leadership skills, influence and authority. I am a visionary and I have relational equity in my context. The congregation in this project was willing to step out of their comfort zones and trust me. These things were a great support for my Doctor of Ministry project.

The theme of my Doctoral of Ministry project was "Keys to Unlock Your Relationship with God." A problem today is that Christians often practice their faith through streams of information rather than transformation, and thus often miss out on encountering and experiencing the living God. I have witnessed this in my congregation, as many are spectators in their faith walk. At one time, I too lived the spectator life as someone who only knew about God. I still have a passion to know God more and I am passionate to help others know and experience God. In this Doctor of Ministry project, I argued that when a person has a personal encounter with God, then they will have a transformative experience.

The general plan of my doctoral project was to create an event or retreat where group participants encounter God in personal ways including worship, prayer, teaching, and spiritual practices. A general plan for implementation involved creating a survey prior to the event to gain a sense of each participant's spiritual condition, relationship with God, desire for growth, and commitment to their faith. A team was assembled to plan and execute the spiritual encounter event with a focus on prayer. I led the team in all elements of the encounter event. My focus was to praise God, enter his presence, provide transformative teaching, and create a responsive atmosphere where participants encounter

the power and presence of God. An important element in my project was creating and implementing resources for participants to grow in their faith journey, post event.

Context

The context of my research was Faith Community United Methodist Church located in West Chester, Ohio, and the larger United Methodist denomination. Faith Community United Methodist Church is part of a global denomination with a rich history. John and Charles Wesley were founders of the Methodist movement. The brothers were raised in a Christian home. Their father Samuel was a pastor, and their mother Susannah instilled in her children the love of God, spiritual practices, disciplines, and accountability. It is said she covered her face with her apron several times a day to pray, the apron being a signal for prayer time and for her children to not disturb their mother.

The Wesley brothers were the founders of the Methodist church as we know it today. John and Charles were part of something called the Holy Club at their alma mater in Oxford, England, at Christ Church.[2] They were dubbed methodical for their spiritual practices, and thus the new movement began. Their goal was to live a holy life, engaging in weekly prayer, Bible study, worship, fasting, and serving those in need. Some called them "enthusiasts" (people who were Spirit-filled), directed as an insulting term.[3] How

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[2] Joe Lovino, "The Method of Early Methodism: The Oxford Holy Club," United Methodist Communications, September 20, 2016, https://www.umc.org/en/content/the-method-of-early-methodism-the-oxford-holy-club.

[3] Andrew J. Schleicher, "Why the Wesley's, and others, came to be called Methodists," United Methodist Communications, September 21, 2015, https://www.umc.org/en/content/why-the-wesleys-and-others-came-to-be-called-methodists.

they lived was considered out of the norm of what was deemed religious. Wesley believed holiness and spiritual growth were most likely to happen in the context of being in a Christian community, with the ability to watch over one another in love.[4]

The early Methodists would gather in small groups called band meetings and class meetings. The band meetings consisted of a small number of people who were of the same gender and grouped together by marital status. The focus and purpose of the band meeting was confession of sin, the forgiveness of sin, and restoration. Band meetings were founded on a Scripture found in the book of James: "Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective" (5:16). The class meeting was a bit larger with twelve group members, again separated by gender. Its focus was on the condition of someone's soul in relation to their relationship with God. The original question asked at each meeting was, "How does your soul prosper?" It has been adapted over the years to "How is it with your soul?" or "How is your relationship with God?" These questions get to the heart of a person's intimacy with God. Both meetings were foundational to the Methodist movement.

In 1738, Wesley had a conversion moment while hearing the reading of Luther's preface to Romans. It was in that moment that he felt his heart strangely warmed and he sensed the assurance of his salvation. His encounter occurred at a meeting on Aldersgate Street and is known as his Aldersgate Experience. The following year he encountered a

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[4] Kevin Watson, "The Methodist Band Meeting: Confession Is For Protestants Too!," Seedbed Inc., January 21, 2015, https://seedbed.com/kevin-watson-the-methodist-band-meeting-confession-is-for-protestants-too/.

second work of grace at a meeting on Fetter Lane. He and others felt the powerful touch of the Holy Spirit. Both spiritual encounters are foundational to Methodist history.

In 1784, Wesley sent Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury to the United States to establish the Methodist Church. Asbury traveled the country by horseback sharing the gospel and starting new worshiping communities. The Methodist movement grew exponentially under his leadership, growing from 1,200 people to 214,000 members and 700 ordained preachers.[5] Asbury is often referred to as the father of American Methodism.

Wesley embraced four different methods for how a person could gain theological understanding. In 1964, Albert Outler, a theologian and scholar, formed these four ways into the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. Wesley believed the core of the Christian faith was 1) revealed in Scripture, 2) observed by religious tradition, 3) embraced by personal experience, and 4) confirmed by reason.[6] The Wesleyan Quadrilateral can be understood through the illustration of a windchime. The outer chimes represent tradition, reason, and experience. Scripture is the ball in the center and the Holy Spirit is the one who causes the beautiful sound of the chimes to work together in unison.

Throughout early Methodist history, God encounters are recorded as transformational experiences. The research in the following chapters will bring forth and recapture the powerful encounters of God in our Methodist history. Wesley did not shy away from the supernatural. Much of the primitive Methodists' rich, charismatic history

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[5] Matt Kinnel, "Francis Asbury," Asbury University, accessed August 28, 2023, https://www.asbury.edu/academics/resources/library/archives/biographies/francis-asbury/.

[6] Brian K. Milford, et al, *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 82.

has been lost in the local church. My hope was to recapture these aspects of our supernatural God that Methodism was formed out of by embracing Wesley's original beliefs. The Wesleyan Quadrilateral is a tool that helps believers understand their faith. I leveraged the four elements of Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. This project emphasized the experience dimension of the Quadrilateral.

In 1968, the Methodist denomination merged with the Evangelical United Brethren Church and became the United Methodist Church.[7] Faith Community is a part of the United Methodist denomination and shares its early roots with the newly formed denomination. Faith Community UMC began meeting in Hopewell Junior School on August 21st of that year in the school gymnasium. That September the church got its official name, Faith Community United Methodist Church. The small group of attendees wanted the church to be a community of believers and be a faith presence in the area. Thirty-five people were brought into official church membership as charter members. In 1968, the church had substantially grown to one hundred members, and it was decided the time was right to build a church building. The official church building opened in September of 1969. The church is nestled between two schools. White colored bricks were chosen for the outside structure so it would stand in contrast between the schools.

As the church grew in membership, so did its physical structure. In 1989, a new sanctuary was added to the church, with seating for 300 parishioners. In 1995, a new type of worship experience was introduced called contemporary worship. It featured drums, an electric guitar, a keyboard, and upbeat music. Throughout the next six years, the church

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[7] "Our Roots," The United Methodist Church, accessed August 28, 2023, https://www.umc.org/en/who-we-are/history/our-roots.

experienced exponential growth. Attendance averaged around 300 parishioners in the early nineties and grew to over 800 in attendance by the year 2000. It was clear the church needed additional space once again.

In 2003, a new education wing for preschool and other children was added, as well as a new youth room, community room, and Christian Living Center. The Christian Living Center would become a multi-use space and would house the contemporary service on Sunday morning. Worship attendance had grown to over 800 on Sunday morning. The church was landlocked, so a decision was made to expand by planting another church out of Faith Community. Water's Edge United Methodist Church was launched in 2008. From 2010–2021 the church began to decline in membership, with an average attendance of 450. The decline was due to members leaving and attending new mega-churches in the area. The COVID-19 pandemic also added to this decline.

The Disciple Bible Study program was foundational to the discipleship ministry at Faith Community. This unique Bible program formed out of the Methodist publishing house. There are four different Disciple Bible studies, each thirty-two weeks in length. At Faith Community, each participant received a disciple pin and certificate at the end of each study. Participants were recognized in front of the congregation and even in the local newspaper. This set the foundation for small group ministry at the church. In 2003, the church launched its first church-wide study called, The Purpose Driven Life, by Rick Warren. Church-wide studies would become a cornerstone for spiritual growth for the next fifteen years. In church-wide studies, all groups study the same thing, at the same time, in conjunction with weekly sermons.

Faith Community has a preschool. It was started in 1994 as an outreach in the community to give preschoolers an opportunity to learn about God and to prepare them for socialization and kindergarten. It started with five classes and included classes for children aged three, four, and five years old. It was also considered a feeder for young families to attend church. The children's ministry and the preschool share the same classroom space. The church also has a youth ministry program that focuses on a student's faith journey and Christian fellowship.

During this doctoral research, I was reappointed to Lindenwald United Methodist Church in Hamilton, Ohio. The new ministry context is within a ten-mile range of the former ministry context. After evaluating the new context, I concluded that the previous research would be valid and useful in the new ministry context, as they are homogeneous.

Data Analysis

Data collection was obtained through Mission Insite and Pew forum websites. The demographic statistics reflect a ten-mile radius from Faith Community United Methodist Church. Major employers in the area include General Electric, Procter & Gamble, Kroger, Great American Insurance, and Cincinnati Financial. Major universities within a thirty-minute drive include the University of Cincinnati, Xavier University, and Miami University. Residents in this radius are well educated: 27% of those polled hold a bachelor's degree, 17% have some type of professional degree, and another 17% have some college. Employment is mostly white collar with a high percentage of 73%.

Employment consists of 28% in professional specialty jobs, 21% managerial executive, and 27% blue-collar.[8]

The area has a median age range of fifty-five to sixty-four years of age and is predominantly a white or Caucasian community. The average household consists of three to four people. Over half of those polled are married, and close to a third are single or widowed. Religious affiliations have changed over the years. Notable changes reflect a decrease in Catholic worshipers and an increase in non-denominational worshipers. The Catholic faith represents 25.7% of the area and is down 3.8%, while non-denominational churches make up 8.5%, an increase of 1.9%.[9] No church affiliation is up almost 4% and makes up of 25% of the area. Those who ascribe to the United Methodist denomination is slightly low at 8% in affiliation. This data reveals a great opportunity to reach the "none's" in the area since a quarter of the population reports no church affiliation. The United States is seeing a shift and decline in church attendance and affiliation as well.

Similarly, the congregation reflects the demographics in the radius. It is predominantly white (98%), and a good percentage of its people are highly educated. Many hold positions of authority in their professions including professors, doctors, and business executives. The congregation has aged over the years with an average age of over fifty or more. It mainly consists of families, with a few singles who identify as divorced or never married. The single person demographic, whether divorced or never married, is a great growth opportunity for the church. Diversity and inclusion are other

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[8] Mission Insite, "The FullInsite Report," Mission Insite, accessed May 4, 2021, https://peopleview.missioninsite.com/app/#/welcome/demographics/step-5.

[9] Mission Insite, "ReligiousInsite Report 2017," Mission Insite, accessed May 4, 2021, https://peopleview.missioninsite.com/app/#/welcome/demographics/step-5.

obvious areas of growth. The church's young families aged out and were not replaced throughout the years. The area is also very transient because of large companies in the area. The area has a growing presence of new non-denominational churches. The church has witnessed a decline in attendance over the past fifteen years due to families moving or changing churches.

Mission Insite offered specific data regarding religion, and their statistics are in comparison with the national average. Of those polled, 64% believe God is love and invites the world into a loving relationship; 19.4% were unsure or undecided; and 64.5% believe in a personal relationship with God, one living God who is Lord and Savior.[10] Around 30% believe Jesus is the only way to human salvation. Another 30% believe that to be a follower of Jesus it does not require participation in the church. Many believers are comfortable in their faith and do not feel the need to attend worship. We have seen an increase in church attendees losing their faith in the institution of the church. This data reveals that a high number of individuals believe in God and a personal relationship with God. However, over half of those polled feel that having faith does not require church participation. This data reveals an opportunity to engage individuals in a transformative encounter with God.

The United Methodist Church offers statistics as recent as 2014. The age range in the United Methodist denomination includes 40% who are age forty-nine and younger, and 60% who are over fifty years old.[11] Over half of the worshipers are women and are

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[10] Mission Insite, "ReligiousInsite Report 2017: Beliefs about God," Mission Insite, accessed May 4, 2021, https://peopleview.missioninsite.com/app/#/welcome/demographics/step-5.

[11] "Members of the United Methodist Church," Pew Research Center, accessed August 28, 2023, https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-denomination/united-methodist-church/.

mostly white or Caucasian, and over 60% are married. The larger UMC is becoming an aging denomination and a growing population of unmarried individuals.

The statistics regarding spiritual practices are very interesting and enlightening. Worshipers attend service at varying rates: 44% attend once a week, 39% once or twice a month, and 17% seldom. Faith Community has a moderate percentage of regular attenders, many who attend once or twice a month, a some who attend seldom. The church has discovered those who attend on occasion have a strong affiliation with the church even though they rarely attend. This data presents an opportunity to engage with those individuals who do not attend regularly yet acknowledge a church home.

Prayer is core to the Christian faith. Pew research reveals 62% of those polled pray daily, 21% weekly, 6% monthly, and 9% seldom or never.[12] Clearly, a combined high percentage of people pray daily or weekly. This is an encouraging statistic in a person's desire to seek God in prayer. This data is an indication of a desire for believers to know God.

Spiritual disciplines are practices that foster a believer's relationship with God. Disciplines include worship, reading Scripture, and prayer, among others. Over 20% of those polled engage in spiritual practices such as Bible study or small groups weekly or monthly. This is a tremendous area of growth among the United Methodists who were involved in this research. The church had a robust small group ministry with an average of 40–50% of attendees connected to some type of group. There is a desire to be

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[12] "Members of the United Methodist Church," Pew Research Center, accessed August 28, 2023, https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-denomination/united-methodist-church/.

connected to others through community in the church. A challenge is that most of the group content is surface or topical and is lacking in spiritual depth.

Spiritual peace and well-being are challenging, even for Christians. Society, culture, and the changing world can be draining. The statistics are encouraging with over 60% saying they experience spiritual peace and well-being once a week. This data is similar to the response about prayer. One might see a connection between peace, well-being, and the practice of prayer.

One of the greatest ways God communicates to us is through the Bible. It provides a means to know God through the written and inspired Word. Data shows that those who read and do not read the Bible are similar in ranking: 39% of those polled read the Bible once a week and 37% said seldom or never.[13] Small group studies have grown in popularity over the decades and many of them are topical in nature with Scripture reference, but not Scripture study. This data reveals a tremendous opportunity to help believers encounter God through the Bible and create spiritual discipline habits.

This data fuels my doctoral project. Data shows a strong desire to be in a relationship with God, yet a small percentage are active in Christian formation through regular Bible study or Scripture reading. In the ministry context, there is a growing awareness and concern about surface-level discipleship. There is a desire for spiritual depth and to encounter God. According to Barna research report from 2022, “People are

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[13] “Members of the United Methodist Church,” Pew Research Center, accessed August 28, 2023, https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-denomination/united-methodist-church/.

looking for eye opening spiritual experiences, they are not starving for knowledge but experience."[14] This information supports the problem and hypothesis of the project.

Ministry Journey

I felt the call to pastoral ministry but lacked confidence and education. I wrestled with God, feeling unequipped. I experienced fruitful years of leading in lay ministry, yet God continued to tug on my heart. As I began to speak out loud to others about what God had spoken to my heart, my call to pastoral ministry was affirmed. God had planted seeds in my life, and they were beginning to grow and sprout. He revealed to me that my pivotal life experiences would serve as opportunities to glorify him. I had been on staff as the Director of Discipleship for seven years, so I had some level of comfort in the church. My prayer was for doors to open if it was God's will that I seek the path of pastoral ministry, or for him to close doors if not. On the day I wrote this chapter I was a new doctoral student.

I have done several personality assessments over the years. In my Myers-Briggs type indicator, my personality type is ESFJ (Extroversion, Sensing, Feeling, Judging), which reflects my being energized by others, and positive emotion. I have a keen Sensing ability to plan out the details and procedures and enjoy routines. I see the Feeling indicator as my strongest personality attribute. I listen with my heart and seek to understand others to affirm them. I live out the Judging indicator by finding joy in

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[14] Rev. Dr. Craig Springer, "State of the Church: A Spiritually Open Moment," United Theological Seminary, Doctor of Ministry Intensive, August 22, 2024, Dayton Ohio, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=elgs4PmnI04.

checking things off my list and reaching goals. In the Strengths Finder assessment, my top three strengths are positivity, includer, and connectedness.

As I explored my call, I learned that I had different options in the pastoral ministry. I felt the calling to seek the Elder track and become ordained, but I did not have the education. I started the Course of Study program at United Theological Seminary. This credentialing would allow me to become a licensed local pastor. I spent a year and a half in the program. During that time, God built up my confidence and I realized that I was capable of more. I began to explore my calling again because of that confidence. I knew that if becoming an elder was his path for me that I needed to begin to pray and research a path forward. I stopped Course of Study, enrolled at Grand Canyon University in the online program, and spent two years earning a BA in Christian Studies. Again, I felt this was God working through me, affirming me, giving me the confidence in my calling and myself. Once I completed my degree, I enrolled at United Theological Seminary to begin work on my Master of Divinity degree.

I spent three years at United to earn my Master of Divinity degree. I learned a lot about the Bible, church history, theology, and was introduced to the charismatic framework of the Bible and to spiritual gifts. I made lots of new friends and connected with the faculty and staff. I traveled to the Holy Land as part of an immersion trip. It was fantastic and the experience opened the Bible to me in profound ways to know Jesus more.

I was invited to attend a Voice of the Apostles conference with other students and

alumni of United.[15] It was unlike anything I had ever experienced. I became hungry for more of God and to experience him afresh and anew. I had the Holy Spirit in me, but VOA stoked that fire. The group I was with was able to have some individual time with Randy Clark. He offered great advice to us Methodists. He encouraged us to speak about the charismatic in our own Wesleyan language so others could understand it.

Later that day, I experienced ministry time. It was wild! People were falling down everywhere under the Spirit's immanent power. They were shaking, crying, and even screaming. My group remained where we were seated, and Randy came to us in our row and prayed for us. I was not sure what to expect given what I was seeing. That day, I received the baptism of the Holy Spirit and received an impartation of new power and boldness. I had never felt that type of intense heat in my body and I could not stop shaking my hands. Some of the words he spoke to me were "revival," "Wesley roots," "do it again," "gifts of mercy," "compassion," "covenant," "embrace history," and "take a risk." It was a powerful experience. A theme I kept hearing throughout the VOA conference was the differentiation between performance and presence.

The encounter radically changed the way I preach and view worship. It shifted my focus of preaching and ministry from information to transformation. I became convinced that if all the church leadership offers is information, then the fullness of God's revelation has not been achieved. A classmate of mine prophesied over me prior to graduation. Some of the words he shared were that I was a "spiritual mother," "people will say that I have been with Jesus," and I "will be given authority." Going to seminary has not only

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[15] Voice of the Apostles is the name of a charismatic conference that historically ran yearly under the oversight of Global Awakening, whose president is Dr. Randy Clark.

given me an education, but it has blessed me with impartation and new spiritual gifts. I often write down words of prophecy when someone prays over me so I can go back and read them. I feel they are words of encouragement from the Lord.

I graduated in May 2019, but I knew there was more. I was commissioned as a Provisional Elder in the United Methodist Church following graduation. I had just finished over five consecutive years of school. The seminary sent out a flyer to former students and donors highlighting different students who were graduating with the opportunity to give financially to the seminary. Much to my surprise, I was on the front cover. Under my photo were the words "accelerate the movement." I felt those were prophetic words for me personally. All that I learned, both academically and spiritually, was about to be released. God has called me to champion a new movement for the Kingdom of God. I was ordained an Elder in Full Connection in the United Methodist Church in May 2021.

My seminary experience gave me the confidence to take a risk and step out of my comfort zone to offer prayer and healing. My sermons and ministry time began including experiences and not just information. I began to share of my experiences with the Holy Spirit, including impartation, my baptism of the Spirit, baptism of joy, and the gift of speaking in tongues, with some trusted folks in the congregation. It was exciting but also risky to share because in the United Methodist Church most have suppressed our supernatural history. These gifts and moves of the Holy Spirit are foreign and questioned in my denomination at times.

I had this nudge throughout my master's program that there was more for me; God was not done. I enjoy learning and I missed being in the classroom. After seminary,

I enrolled in the Global Certification program with Global Awakening. I took two classes in the Christian Prophetic track. I learned about prophecy, how to hear from the Lord, and dream interpretation.

One of our assignments in the Christian Prophetic class was to envision a treasure chest and ask God what gift he had for me. As I quieted myself, I envisioned a treasure chest and I asked God, "What present do you want to give me?" My mind went to Capernaum. I have visited there twice, and it is a special place for me. In my mind, I looked around and felt joy and peace. I felt him saying, "Open your Bible and I will show you what present I have for you." I picked up my Bible and started looking at passages that took place in Capernaum. The Lord led me to Mark 2:1–12, the story of the paralyzed man. My eyes focused on Mark 2:11: "I tell you, get up, take up your mat and go." I believe this was a word from the Lord, to pick up my mat and go; now was the time to begin to work on my doctorate.

The driving influence for the topic of my project was a desire for people to have regular God encounters and a transformative relationship with him. Several factors have influenced my choice of topic. Twenty years ago, my heart was touched by the power of the Holy Spirit. This encounter occurred during the Walk to Emmaus retreat. This encounter changed the trajectory of my life. As a result, I changed careers and started working in vocational ministry. This ultimately led to my call to pastoral ministry. Higher education was a requirement for this calling, and I spent the next five years completing a bachelor's degree in Christian studies and earning a Master of Divinity degree. During this season, I not only received an education but also had a great awakening to the Holy Spirit and encountered God in mighty ways. This came through classes on church

renewal, attending the Holy Spirit Seminar[16], experiencing Voice of the Apostles, and more. These experiences were God encounters for me.

Synergy

Ever since I was a young adult, God has been drawing himself near to me and I have drawn near to him. I have had a strong desire to know him more. Over the years, my faith has grown as I have encountered him through the pages of Scripture and personal experience. I believe God wants to continually grow our faith in order to know him experientially and be known by him in more relationally dynamic ways. John Wesley desired to know and experience more of God. The United Methodist denomination has roots in the holiness movement which boasts of powerful God encounters that foster spiritual growth and build faith. I desire to recapture these roots and help other followers of Christ to encounter the power and presence of God. God has been equipping and preparing me for such a time as this.

The topic I explored through this Doctor of Ministry project was encountering God. Many believers settle for a faith in which a person knows about God but does not know God. My skills and interests served the needs of my context through the Doctor of Ministry project in a variety of ways. I am a highly relational person and have relational equity with many. People trust me and are willing to be stretched spiritually because of this trust. I started this doctoral project with a belief that I could foster spiritual growth in my participants through encountering God. I have strong organizational skills, am a

[16] The Holy Spirit Seminar is a one-day annual conference held at United Theological Seminary in Dayton Ohio. This conference teaches about the person and work of the Holy Spirit based on pneumatological theory and practice.

visionary, lead well, and have a passion for people. I am well versed in the Word and have the ability, with the power of the Holy Spirit, to make it come alive for others. My previous experiences and encounters with God served this project and context well.

The general nature and content of the proposed project was to create an opportunity for participants to have a transformative experience by encountering God. Pre- and post-questionnaires were completed before the encounter event to get a sense of each person's spiritual condition, their relationship with God, their desire for growth, and commitment to their faith. Prayer undergirded the project and event. I led my team in all elements of the encounter event. The main foci were to enter into God's presence, provide transformative teaching, and create a responsive atmosphere where participants could gain new personal and experiential knowledge of God. During this project, I co-labored with God on behalf of my participants so they could encounter him. My desired outcome was based on measuring the participant's relational knowledge of God.

Conclusion

The general nature and content of my project was to create an event where participants encounter God. The name of the project was Keys to Unlock Your Relationship with God. The desired outcome of the project was to measure everyone's personal experience of how they did or did not encounter God. The ultimate goal was spiritual transformation. My working hypothesis was: if a person engages in a six-week transformative discipleship process, participants will move from a theoretical knowledge of God to an experiential knowledge of God.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

A key problem in Western Christianity that many believers are facing is they settle for knowing about God and not really knowing him. A key biblical revelation to explore in this regard is its testimony that if a person experiences the presence of God, then they will come to know him more. In this chapter, the analysis provided an overview of Ephesians 1:17–19 and addressed how this passage relates to the problem, hypothesis, and project. This biblical passage related to the project by illuminating how a person can gain spiritual wisdom and knowledge by encountering God. The encounter fueled intimacy with God in the project, leading to transformation, and ultimately knowing God more. It informed the project by reclaiming this prayer for modern-day believers as a still-current catalyst for spiritual growth.

The book of Ephesians and in particular the apostle Paul's opening prayer is significant to the problem, hypothesis, and project. The book of Ephesians, written by the apostle Paul, deals with spiritual blessings that are available to every believer. He was making the reader aware of the life-changing transformational blessings that are available. From the approach Paul takes to the Ephesian letter, it seems that a problem was that the Ephesian Christians who believed in the Lordship of Jesus Christ were settling for a life of knowing about God and not experiencing his goodness, power, and

an intimate relationship by receiving wisdom and knowledge. This same problem persists in believers today.

The common spiritual condition of many believers is that they have a saving faith in Christ but settle for a life of knowing about God instead of knowing and experiencing God, while others simply settle for the identity of servant and miss out on the blessings of being a child of God—called and chosen. When the apostle Paul interceded in prayer for his readers and said, "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 1:17), he reminded them to never stop praying and asking God to reveal himself to his followers. Paul's belief is God offers followers of Christ more than they could ask or imagine.

Paul believed that if a person experienced the power of God, the person would have a transformational encounter that would create an intimate knowledge of God. Paul understood that one of the ways faith grows is through a heart-changing spiritual experience. As a result, an individual would experience the eyes of their heart being illuminated and thus gain new wisdom and revelation to know God more. The book of Ephesians is a Spirit-inspired discourse concerning the power and presence of God that is available to every believer. It is an opportunity for believers to enter God's power and presence in experiential ways, true to the way Paul expressed it to the Ephesians.

The pericope chosen for this biblical analysis related to the project in explaining how a believer can personally experience God for themselves and, as a result, know him more and grow in one's relationship with him. The apostle Paul crafted a beautiful prayer of what is possible for those who believe. This pericope shaped the project by fostering a new mindset that if a believer can experience God in a new way, then it will cause the

believer to know God more and result in a change in her or his spiritual condition as a believer in Christ.

This chapter discussed the historical context of Ephesus, as well as shed light on the people of Ephesus and their spiritual condition and spiritual transformation. It also unveiled the apostle Paul's conversion, ministry, and missionary journey. It addressed the many spiritual blessings that are available to all believers as stated in the apostle Paul's prayer to the Ephesians, blessings that provide a means to know God more and that are still available today for those who believe in Jesus Christ.

Saul's Conversion

The apostle Paul, once known as Saul, a tentmaker from Tarsus, spent much of his life as a Pharisee, well-versed in Scripture. Viewing Christianity as a threat to his own religious ideals, he relentlessly persecuted Christians. It was on the road to Damascus that God blinded Saul, beginning his transformational experience with God in which he was radically changed. While blind, he was led to believe in Jesus. He professed Christ as his Lord and Savior and was baptized. It appeared as if scales fell off his eyes. He began to see again, but with new eyes. The Lord used Paul's background, his training, and his weaknesses for his purposes and gave him a new mission: to carry the Good News of Jesus to people everywhere, mostly to the Gentiles and those of the Greek world. Thus, Saul accepted his new name of 'Paul,' which is the Greek version of the name 'Saul.' Paul became one of the greatest apostles for the kingdom of God. A substantial part of the New Testament consists of his writings. God opened Paul's eyes to see anew and

illuminate a path for Paul to walk in His wisdom, revelation, and power. Paul's path reveals the goodness of God and of the blessings God has for all believers.

The Apostle Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians

In all of Paul's epistles, he offers spiritual insight and wisdom that often reveal the spiritual condition of believers. In the book of Ephesians, the apostle Paul's lengthy prayer is for believers to be blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ. Divine benefits are poured out over the audience, including being chosen as children by God in Christ and being redeemed through grace. Paul also mentions grace in his second letter to the Corinthians saying, "But he said to me, my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me" (2 Cor. 12:3). Longenecker asserts that Paul wants his readers to understand and fully grasp that the same Spirit of God who raised Jesus from the dead is in and among them.[1] There is power for those who believe in Jesus, but many underestimate what is available. Many view Scripture as stories of things God did years ago. They appreciate the mighty miracles God historically performed, but they do not seek after the same power and miraculous experiences today. God gives power to the powerless and offers hope to the hopeless in every generation.

It is suggested that the book of Ephesians was written in or near Ephesus likely around AD 90.[2] Modern-day Ephesus is in Turkey near the western shores. Next to

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[1] Bruce W. Longenecker, *Thinking Through Paul: A Survey of His Life, Letters, and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 249.

[2] Longenecker, *Thinking Through Paul,* 244.

Rome, Ephesus was one of the most important cities visited by the apostle Paul and could be considered the capital of Christianity. This famous city was the strategic location and a central location for his missionary plans. He spent time staying in the city of Ephesus during his seasons of ministry, often for many months at a time. He and the people of Ephesus shared a special friendship. Because of this friendship, Paul could challenge their beliefs and man-made gods, and, as a result, many began to follow Jesus and become a part of the Way, as it was called.

The Way was a group of individuals who followed the ways and teachings of Christ. This angered some because of the division it caused. Ephesus was a hub of pagan worship and was at the center of production for the making of idols, so many were angry at Paul for tarnishing their trade and the possibility of losing its good name. He threatened not only their idol worship but their commerce as well. Christianity began to spread after Paul visited and when he returned, he saw this vast area evangelized, despite conflicts.[3]

Ephesus was an important city for Christianity. In fact, sometime later, when John wrote the book of Revelation, the church of Ephesus was first among the seven churches listed. The church was praised for their perseverance and endurance, yet they were called to repentance, and to do the things they had done in the beginning (Rev. 2:17). It was as if they had slipped away from their intimacy and relationship with the Lord. The messages in both the book of Ephesians and the book of Revelation are relevant today and serve as reminders of the goodness of God and the blessings that await every believer

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[3] Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary NT*, vol.1 (Colorado Springs, CO: Cook Communications Ministries, 2007), 584.

in Christ for those to know him and experience his presence. Throughout the pages of Scripture, there is evidence of people being enticed to embrace other belief systems, being lax in moral standards, and falling away. Paul's letter is critical to all believers to know and understand what is available to them in God, through the love of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit. Longenecker asserts again that Paul is revealing what is available for all believers: God's wisdom, revelation, and spiritual enlightenment to know him more.

The apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesians, directed toward the Christian congregation in Ephesus, is traditionally believed to be written while Paul was in prison and thus is considered one of the Prison Epistles.[4] It is both doctrinal and practical with an emphasis on the church being the body of Christ. There appears to have been no opposition to or issue with the apostle Paul's teaching, so it can be inferred that the letter was well received. The congregation itself was receptive to the impartation of advanced instruction in theology and ethics. This letter was considered circular and dispersed to a wide geographical area, which is probably why it was vague in its introductory acknowledgements. At the time, Ephesus was a trade center and with an exceptional harbor, the community was a hub for business. Thus, many who lived in the area were people of great means.[5]

In his writing, themes of great spiritual blessings are being directed to individuals by the promised Holy Spirit, which incorporates the Gentiles with the Jews as its

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[4] Harold W. Hoehner, Philip W. Comfort, and Peter H. Davids, *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1&2 Thessalonians, Philemon*, vol. 16 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2008), 214, Logos Edition.

[5] Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary NT*, 526.

audience, a union that is forged by Christ producing a movement of spiritual growth. New moral and spiritual standards were being unfolded in the epistle that had been eternally planned. This was not only good news for the Ephesians, but for believers today as well. God desires more for believers and in them. This spiritual growth specifically applies to the context of the doctoral project in how believers can know God more and have a deeper relationship with Him.

This epistle reveals the nature of Jesus Christ and how the church fulfills the purposes of Christ. Christ renews human lives and then connects them into a new community, called the church.[6] The epistle is viewed as a bold statement of what God is doing in creation and salvation. It starts with the standard greeting of Paul identifying himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ but then adds the words "by the will of God" (Eph. 1:1), revealing the authority of the apostle to write the document. In the first three chapters of Ephesians, Paul focuses on the great privileges the Christian individual receives from God through Christ. A renewed life is vital in the corporate church.

In the first chapter a significant prayer is revealed with blessings, hope for the future, spiritual inheritance, and an awareness of the power of God at work in their lives. The prayer begins with stressing God's goodness to the readers through what has been done for them in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus.[7] Once dead in sin, the new believer has been saved by God's grace and is now seated with Christ in heavenly places. When seated next to Christ in the heavenly realms, the perspective

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[6] C. Leslie Mitton, *The New Century Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1981), 32.

[7] Pheme Perkins, "Ephesians." *Interpretation* 53, no. 2 (April 1999): 192–193, https://journals-sagepub-om.dtl.idm.oclc.org/doi/pdf/10.1177/002096430004700105.

changes. The view provides insight to see others as Jesus sees them and it impacts a person's spiritual condition. Christ desires for His believers to rise above with him spiritually and invites them to take a new seat with him. The believer's praying posture changes from a vantage point of earth to heaven to instead a vantage point of heaven to earth, with the mindset of Christ.

The apostle Paul outlines specific ways he wants his readers to grow in their knowledge of God. The prayer includes two major parts: the first is the Spirit has divine wisdom and reveals the mysteries of God; the second is the Spirit channels these divine gifts to believers.[8] The prophet Isaiah writes, "The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him, the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord" (Isa. 11:2). The purpose of divine illumination is for an increase of knowledge of God. It is to know God and to experience him as Father and God, to walk in obedience, in worship, and have a heightened spiritual awareness. This moves a person from a casual or impersonal relationship to one that is personal and intimate.

A New Identity in Christ

The apostle Paul presents a new identity to the Gentiles, complete with all its divine origins and a new code of conduct befitting a new people. The essence of his message is that by the love and grace of God, though all humanity was once dead outside of God's covenant and far from Christ, the believer is now alive and reconciled to God

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[8] Grant R. Osborne, *Ephesians: Verse by Verse* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), 31, https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/lib/dtl/reader.action?docID=5153170.

and is therefore a part of God's family.[9] Another word for covenant is testament. This sheds light on the Old and New Testament, or Old and New Covenant. In the Old Covenant God reveals a special relationship with a chosen group of people, called the Israelites. They were to remain loyal to God through obedience and worship him only. In return, God would bless them and make their descendants into a great nation. God instituted a sacrificial system that would allow them to be cleansed of their sins. Ordained priests represented the people before God, and the people could not come directly in contact with God or his presence. The priests served as a mediator between God and the Israelites.

In the New Covenant, God sends Christ as mediator. Christ is the high priest of the New Covenant, and as a result, believers can personally come into God's presence. Jesus takes the sin of humans upon himself and is the ultimate sacrifice. Believers have direct and intimate access to God because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. In the apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he beautifully expresses the type of spiritual life that is available to all believers with God under the New Covenant in Christ Jesus. Christ does not come to abolish the law, but rather he comes to fulfill it and offer abundant life in God.

The epistle is written with visionary language and spiritual images. It stresses to readers their new identity in Jesus Christ. It embodies themes of thanksgiving, prayer, the unifying work of God in Jesus, unity, maturity, family relations, and spiritual struggles. It focuses on inward transformation and a changed life in Christ. As a result of God's

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[9] E. D. Mbennah, "The Goal of Maturity in Ephesians 4:13–16," *Acta Theologica* 36, no. 1 (October 2016): 111, https://www-proquest-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/docview/2183261866?accountid=202487.

transforming grace in the work of the Ephesians' lives, they would fully grasp the effects of their salvation.[10] When an individual seeks God with their whole heart, a holy transformation transpires. A renewing of their mind and thoughts begins to take place because of the change of heart.

The apostle Paul's lengthy prayer in chapter one uses subtle yet bold trinitarian language. He shares beautiful imagery of the relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: God as Father, Jesus as redeemer, and Holy Spirit as counselor. The glorious Father of the Lord Jesus Christ sent the Holy Spirit to illumine their minds. He is not only their God but the God of their Lord Jesus. He then proceeds to ask Father God to give believers the Spirit of wisdom and revelation to know him, as the purpose of Spirit is to give enlightenment so that believers would know God more intimately and experientially as Father, and God.

Paul affirms that God's Spirit being in humans is new, thus making each one who receives the Spirit a new creation in Christ. The Spirit not only enables the inclination to learn, but also to teach, receive revelation, and share knowledge with others. Paul asks God to give the saints real and special knowledge. He does this so that they may fully know him. Inward enlightenment fosters spiritual awareness. An awareness of hope, riches, and power are all received and possessed by knowledge. This knowledge is meant to be shared with others, to build others up in the faith, and to foster spiritual growth in the Kingdom of God (Eph. 1:17–23, 2:13–22, 4:11–13).

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[10] Dan Lioy, "Paul's Apocalyptic Interpretation of Reality: A Case Study Analysis of Ephesians 1: 15 – 23," *Conspectus: The Journal of the South African Theological Seminary* 19, no. 03 (March 2015): 48, https://hdl.handle.net/10520/EJC170481.

The apostle Paul used language with a sense of urgency to help his readers grow in their knowledge of God so that they may know him more. In this biblical analysis the following passage from the first chapter of Ephesians will inform this chapter:

> I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people and his incomparably great power for us who believe. (Eph. 1:17–19)

The apostle Paul said, "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better" (Eph. 1:17). His prayer addresses God as the "glorious Father," a liturgical formation of priestly origin rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures.[11]

In his declarative prayer he continues to ask God on behalf of the believer, which is apparent in his prayer of intercession and petition, for the recipients of this epistle to receive the Spirit of wisdom and revelation. The apostle Paul says "may give you" which is translated as confidence and not wishful thinking. It is a prayer for a further gift of God's grace to his audience. This is a prayer for spiritual insight and for inner enlightenment, development, and growth.[12] Paul makes clear who his audience is by repeating the word "you" throughout his prayer. Furthermore, he makes it known that "you," as a believer, are included among the "we" believers, so it is both personal and

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[11] Markus Barth, "Ephesians: Translation and Commentary on Chapters 4-6," in *Anchor Bible* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1974), 149, https://www.dropbox.com/s/gjc8e81145rtpzc/barth_ephesians-a-new-translation-with-introduction-and-commentary-2-vols-AYB-0385044127-0385080379.pdf?dl=0#.

[12] Thomas B. Slater, *Ephesians: Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2012), 48, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=1440524.

corporate.[13] God intends to endow His people with a share in His glory as the glorious Father.

The apostle Paul was steadfast in his prayer for the believers in Ephesus. His love for them is evident in his opening prayer, revealing his heart in continuing to pray on their behalf, asking God for continued blessing and revelation. His words are personal and though directed towards a group of believers, they are received as if he was speaking directly to the individual. The purpose of the Spirit of wisdom and revelation is so that the believer may know God better. The word, "Spirit" translated from the original Greek is *pneuma*, meaning divine God, Christ's spirit, Holy Spirit or a current of air such as a breeze or breath.[14] This indicates that God's Spirit is active and not static.

Paul is praying for something that is already in the possession of believers in Ephesus, but that it might be illuminated. He says that by the Spirit "you" have already received knowledge by being sealed in Christ (Eph. 1:13). As a result, a believer is open to receive the wisdom and revelation he or she needs for an intimate relationship with God. Being sealed in Christ is to be verified as God's child. Believers are marked with a seal—the promise of the Holy Spirit—and protected from the enemy. Paul elsewhere expresses this dynamic 'seal' in experiential and relational terms (Rom. 5:5, 8:15–16).

The prayer is for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that is already in them to give further wisdom, knowledge, and gifts of the Spirit. It is a one-one personal revelation. This threefold enlightenment includes asking for the knowledge of the hope that God's

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[13] John Paul Heil, *Ephesians: Empowerment to Walk in Love for the Unity of All in Christ*, no. 13 (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 10, https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/lib/dtl/reader.action?docID=3118175.

[14] *Bible Hub,* s.v. "Spirit," accessed September 3, 2023, https://biblehub.com/strongs/greek/4151.htm.

calling brings, knowledge of the glory in God's rich inheritance, and knowledge of the immensity of his great power.[15] Believers are given God's great power to fulfill his will in the world. These three aspects of salvation should be experienced in every believer — they foster an awareness of the hope that a believer can enjoy because of being chosen by God and by being brought into a relationship with God himself. Paul affirms that a new Spirit is within humanity.

Wisdom and revelation are both the acts and the effects of inspiration. Furthermore, the Spirit gives both the disposition to learn and to teach. The Spirit helps the believer to not only accept revelation, but to communicate knowledge of God's revelation to others. Believers are vessels who carry the Good News of Jesus. Paul asks God to give the saints real and special knowledge, as this knowledge cultivates a relationship between the glorious Father and child.

The believer must grow in the knowledge of God to know him more. To increasingly know him is the process of sanctification or the appropriation of sanctifying grace. The word "sanctify" means "to be made holy" and "to mold the believer into the likeness of Christ."[16] The believer is a work in progress and is in the process of becoming all that Christ created him or her to be. Since the believer is made in the image of God, the better he or she knows God, the better he or she can understand himself or herself and others. It is not enough to know God as one's Savior and Redeemer in a forensic way. A

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[15] Andrew T. Lincoln, *Word Biblical Commentary*: *Ephesians,* vol. 42 (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1990), 58, www.dropbox.com/s/652qfvr5u5fvl5t/Word%20biblical%20commentary.%20Volume%2042%2C%20Ephesians.%20Andrew%20T.%20Lincoln.%20606031839.%20517.1.pdf?dl=0.

[16] Joe Lovino, "Grace's Power Over Sin: Sanctifying Grace," United Methodist Communications, last modified March 12, 2018, https://www.umc.org/en/content/graces-power-over-sin-sanctifying-grace.

believer must press in to know him, as a Father, Friend, and Guide in life. The deeper the believer knows God, the richer the believer's spiritual life will be. The apostle Paul reminds the church in his letter to the Corinthians about the importance of nourishing humanity's spiritual souls, just as they do for the physical body (1 Cor. 3:1–2). God did not intend for believers to remain as spiritual infants, rather to grow into mature believers who embrace their spiritual inheritance.

The apostle Paul said, "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you" (Eph. 1:18). The eyes of the heart are a means of understanding and being inwardly enlightened, so that the believer becomes centered in and living from the hope to which he or she is called. This enlightenment belongs to everyone within the corporate body of believers.

Transformation happens in the mind and heart when a saving illumination transpires by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel. What the Ephesians needed was God's activation and illumination in their hearts to reveal what they had already received. This active illumination in their hearts, reveals the wisdom of spiritual understanding, and revelation of the secret things of God. These things are new possibilities to know about God, leading to the interpersonal knowing of him, through the personal experience of His being. Human intellectual information is not enough. It is the connection of the head and heart through the ministry of the Spirit that allows the eyes of the heart to be enlightened to the things of God and his holy mysteries.

The heart was considered the source of knowledge; this prayer could be understood as a prayer for spiritual insight, inner enlightenment, and spiritual growth.[17]

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[17] Slater, *Ephesians: Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary*, 48.

Enlightenment comes from the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of wisdom and revelation. The apostle Paul was stressing the need for God's active illumination in their hearts, the wisdom to grasp revelation, and the unveiling of an eternal hope and calling upon their lives. The Holy Spirit reveals truth to his church through his Word and gives the believer wisdom to understand it and apply it to his or her life. Unregenerate humans cannot understand the things of God with the natural mind. They must rely upon the Spirit to guide and reveal truth. God can connect the heart with the head.

Often believers will have an encounter of the heart that leads to transformation of their mind, and a new awareness and connection with God occurs in them. Paul uses figurative language such as "open the eyes of the heart," referring to the capacity of a believer's mind. Being enlightened by God affects how a person thinks and understands and is an expression of God's gracious love. Neither human intellect or carnal wisdom (of the world) can produce knowledge of the one true God.[18] The inability to see and understand spiritual things is not the fault of intelligence but the heart. The eyes of the heart must be opened by God. The work of the Spirit is a continuous process which operates in the life of a believer to impart wisdom and inner enlightenment to know God.[19]

In the early first century the heart was considered the center of one's personality, feelings, and faith. It was also considered the source from which words and actions began

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[18] Stephen E. Fowl, *Ephesians: A Commentary* (La Vergne, TN: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 56, accessed June 1, 2024, https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=3416794.

[19] Markus Barth, "15-23 Intercession, A Praise of God (1:15–23)" in *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 1–3* (New Haven & London: Doubleday & Company, The Anchor Yale Bible, 1975), accessed June 1, 2024, http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9780300262018.0008.CH003, 150.

through emotions, thought, and will.[20] The word "heart" in Greek is *kardia,* and is translated in English as cardiac, referencing the human heart. However, *kardia* in the Greek is understood as heart, thoughts, or feelings. The apostle Paul prays that the eyes of the heart be enlightened, for new understanding in one's thoughts and feelings. The Christian gleans three main focuses that come with an enlightened heart. The first is the hope to which the Christian has been called; the hope of present salvation, and the future to come. It is both now and not yet. The second is regarding the riches of His glorious inheritance—believers are God's special possession. The third is great power for those who believe. Humanity is powerless in the world, but God's mighty power is available and operating on behalf of humankind.[21]

Hope for believers is different than anything the world can offer; rather a certainty that God will follow through on His promises and is conveyed as assurance. Hope enables a person to believe that what seems to be impossible is indeed possible with God. This hope Paul refers to has been eternally planned and is the consummation of God's blessing. Jesus is creation's living hope. Hope is an agent of divine encouragement that can lead to spiritual transformation. God calls His children to a hope that can only be found in him. This hope is revealed when a person comes to know Jesus in both personal and intimate ways. As Burton Scott Easton says,

> Devotion to Christ produced a religious experience that gave certainty to hope. "Hope putteth not to shame; because the love of God hath been shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit which was given unto us" (Rom 5:5; cf 8:16, 17; 2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; Eph 1:14, etc, and see Holy Spirit). Even visible miracles were

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[20] Lincoln, *Word Biblical Commentary*: *Ephesians,* 58.

[21] Osborne, *Ephesians: Verse by Verse*, 32.

> wrought by the Spirit that were signs of the end (Acts 2:17) as well as of the individual's certainty of partaking in the final happiness (Acts 10:47; 19:6, etc).[22]

The passage says believers are called to this hope. Called is an important word in the church, as its meaning is both being called out and that every believer has a holy calling. Christians have been called and have been chosen. By God's grace, He calls believers out of the darkness and into his marvelous light. Paul expresses the hope that belongs to those in Christ because of this calling and further assures the Christians of a wonderful future.

The apostle Paul prayed for enlightenment in the knowledge of "the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe" (1:18–19). He uses a battery of words to convey a power so great, nothing can compare for those who believe. Glory is the essential attribute of the inheritance to be received with the knowledge of how great the rich fullness of his glory is. The greatness of God's power for those who believe reveals the hope of God's calling and the glory of His inheritance. The Greek word for "inheritance" is *klēronomía,* which translates into "given to as a possession," or "eternal blessedness," or "destined for us."[23]

The inheritance of the Christian is the hope in the present salvation and what is to come. God deals with people based on their future and not their past. It is both now and not yet. God's people are his inheritance, his special possession. The riches of His glorious inheritance resides in his holy people, who are called and set apart. By making

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[22] Burton Scott Easton, "Hope," ed. James Orr et al., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Chicago, IL: The Howard-Severance Company, 1915), 1420.

[23] Thomas Kingsmill Abbott, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians* (Edinburgh, UK: T. & T. Clark, 1974), 30, https://www-bloomsburycollections-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/book/epistles-to-the-ephesians-and-to-the-colossians/the-epistle-to-the-ephesians.

His people His inheritance, God has shown the world His steadfast love. The energy of the divine nature is poured out upon the weary souls of humankind to transform and make new with an enlightened spiritual awakening.

Humans are born potentially spiritually rich but unaware of God's resources for them until their trust in Christ is gained. When a Christian grows in the understanding of his or her riches, his or her eyes are opened to fully glorify God with praise and thanksgiving. Believers often search for spiritual meaning or answers in life, not realizing that God has already given these graces to them. It is through illumination by the Spirit that believers have a new awareness of His goodness and grace. The apostle Paul wanted the readers to fully understand the great wealth that is available for those who profess Christ.

The apostle Paul chose a powerful word in the Greek to describe this incredible great power: *dunamis*. The English words derived from this Greek word are "dynamite" or "dynamo" and give a sense of the type of power that is available for believers. This power equips and strengthens believers in their human weakness to do what they cannot do on their own. Paul conveys a divine dynamite and eternal energy available to believers. As James Orr says, "The supreme manifestation of the power, as of the wisdom and love of God, is in redemption (1 Cor 1:18, 24). The preaching of the gospel is accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit."[24] Believers are given power to receive and use, and God's power enables them to use God's wealth. The greatest shortage of power

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[24] James Orr, "Power," ed. James Orr et al., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Chicago, IL: The Howard-Severance Company, 1915), 2427.

today is not from natural sources, but in one's own spiritual life. Every believer can experience God through His calling, riches, glory, and power.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the apostle Paul is a revealed example of God's abundant grace. He is an illustration of a transformed life in Christ due to a personal relationship with God. Just as God opened the eyes of Saul to new life in Christ, He opens the eyes of believers today. A new vision transpires, helping the believer to see things as Christ sees. As a result, there is fresh wisdom and revelation to know God more. It is through intimate moments with the Lord, where relational encounters occur, that hearts begin to change, and the eyes of the heart are illuminated.

As stated earlier, one of the main problems in Christianity is that believers settle for knowing about God and not really knowing him. If a person experiences the presence of God, then they will come to know him more. Once there is a heart change, the light of Christ breaks forth and the eyes of the heart are illuminated, connecting the heart with the head. The proposed hypothesis contends that once a person experiences the presence of God, they come to know God more intimately.

The apostle Paul's powerful prayer in the first chapter of Ephesians supports the project by revealing how a person can gain spiritual wisdom and knowledge by encountering God. Encounters with God lead to life change, and ultimately knowing God more. This passage will inform the project by claiming this prayer for modern-day believers to be a catalyst for spiritual growth and an intimate relationship with the Lord.

Paul's writing to the Ephesians and his prayer are significant to the problem, hypothesis, and project. His epistle to the Ephesians unveils the spiritual blessings which are available to every believer—spiritual blessing's that are life-changing and transformational. The exegesis has shown evidence that during the ancient days of Jesus believers were settling for a life of knowing about God and not experiencing his goodness, power, and an intimate relationship by receiving the Spirit of wisdom and knowledge. Paul wanted believers to embrace the blessings of God and to walk in their inheritance.

The project assumed that the same teaching holds true for believers today as it did during Paul's time. Many have a saving faith in Christ but settle for a life of knowing about God instead of knowing and experiencing God. Others simply settle for the identity of a servant, and they miss out on the blessings of being a child of God. The apostle Paul interceded in prayer for his readers saying, "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 1:17), and he reminds the reader to never stop praying and asking God to reveal himself to them and to others.

Life change is witnessed throughout Scripture. This biblical analysis reveals that if a person experiences the power of God, that person will have a transformational encounter that will cause the person to know God more intimately and grow in his or her faith. One of the ways faith grows is through spiritual experiences. As a result, an individual would experience the eyes of his or her heart being illuminated and thus gain new wisdom and revelation to know God more. Ephesians is a Spirit-inspired epistle, revealing the power and presence of God that is available to every believer. It is a matter of helping a believer tap into God's power and presence.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

In the previous chapters it was argued that experience is a critical component of coming to a full knowledge of God as he intended for all who put their faith in Jesus. One of the greatest examples of this point in church history is found in the life of John Wesley. This chapter will thus provide an overview of John Wesley and his critical experiences of God. It will also address how John Wesley's experience relates to the doctoral project. Wesley, along with his brother, Charles, are the founders of the Methodist Movement. Wesley was an English open-air preacher from the Anglican Church. He wrestled with a sense of assurance that he was saved in Christ. He also grappled with how to have a personal relationship with God—to really know and experience him.

John Wesley knew about God in his early years. He came to know God and have a sense of assurance of his salvation through his Aldersgate experience, but it was his Fetter Lane Society experience that radically changed his relationship with God. There, he was touched and transformed by the power and presence of God. This historical analysis will inform the hypothesis behind this chapter by exploring John Wesley's God encounters and transformational life experiences that led him to personally knowing God.

John Wesley's Early Life

John Wesley was born in Epworth, England on June 28, 1703. He was one son of nineteen children to his parents, Samuel and Susanna Wesley. Eight of Samuel and Susanna's children died young due to various illnesses. Samuel was a Puritan and a conformist pastor.[1] His mother, Susanna, is considered the mother of Methodism by some because of having brought John and Charles into the world. She instilled spiritual disciplines in her children during their formative years. For example, she prayed for two hours a day and created a system with her children to care for one another during her time of prayer.[2] The methods Susanna instilled in her children paved the way for Methodism. Some viewed or used the term "Methodist" derogatorily or critically, insinuating they had a methodical system of doing things.[3] This came directly from Susanna's influence.

A defining moment of John's childhood occurred when a fire broke out in their home. John, who was five years old at the time, was trapped in his upstairs bedroom while flames engulfed the home.[4] He managed to get to a window to cry for help, and two men aided John as he jumped from the window into their arms. John later came to refer to himself as "a brand plucked from the burning."[5] John was quoting Zechariah; "Is

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[1] John Wesley, *The Sermon on the Mount*, ed. Clare George Weakley, Jr. (Alachua, FL: Bridge-Logos, 2010), 1.

[2] Wesley, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 3.

[3] Wesley, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 3.

[4] Wesley, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 5.

[5] Wesley, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 5.

not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" (3:2). For John, this vivid memory was evidence of God's mercy and grace in his life.

John Wesley's Young Adult Life and Formative Years

When John was seventeen years of age, he entered Charterhouse School and Christ Church in Oxford. He was elected a fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford in 1726 and ordained as an Anglican priest two years later.[6] During his time at Oxford, he became one of the leaders of the Holy Club. Wesley was famous for the Oxford Holy Club, which met several times a week to study Scripture, pray, and to examine one's spiritual life.[7] Since Wesley strongly desired holiness, he deemed these spiritual disciplines as of upmost importance. During this time, small networks of societies were forming in London under the influence of Wesley and George Whitefield. These societies would be a spark for the spiritual fire Wesley desired.

Among them there was an energy and readiness for revival. A group called the Moravians were the spark that caused the explosion for Wesley and others.[8] From 1725 to 1729, Wesley attributed his spiritual growth and understanding to early influencers, including Jeremy Taylor, Thomas À. Kempis, and William Law.[9] The writings of these men impacted Wesley's comprehension of what it meant to be a Christian in the full

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[6] Wesley, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 7

[7] Howard A. Snyder, *The Radical Wesley: The Patterns and Practices of a Movement Maker* (Franklin, TN: Seedbed Publishing, 2014), 16.

[8] Colin Podmore, "The Moravians and The Evangelical Revival In England: 1738 – 1748," *Transactions of the Moravian Historical Society* 31 (2000): 31, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41179482.

[9] Andrew C. Thompson, ed., *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection As Believed and Taught by Mr. John Wesley*, The John Wesley Collection (Franklin, TN: Seedbed publishing, 2014), 3.

sense. Because of them, he began to read the Bible differently and felt a necessity of obtaining "the mind which was in Christ," and of "walking as Christ also walked."

Wesley believed that this meant not having just some part of the mind of Christ, but all of it. By this he meant, followers of Christ are to mimic the life of Christ in all ways and situations.[10] These influencers were critical components in the formation of Wesley's desire to know God more intimately. In 1733, Wesley preached his sermon "The Circumcision of the Heart" in which he said, "Have no end, no ultimate end, but God. Desire not to live but to praise [God's] name: let all your thoughts, words, and works tend to [God's] glory. Set your heart firm on [God], and on other things only as they are in and from [God]."[11]

Wesley appealed to the followers of Christ to present themselves as a holy and living sacrifice acceptable before the Lord. He urged them not to conform to the patterns of the world, but to be transformed and have a renewed mind in Christ, referring to Romans 12:2. Weems asserts and affirms that clear and focused Christian leadership is the vehicle God needs to effect God's redemption in the world.[12]

The Moravians

Count Nicolaus von Zinzendorf opened his estate in Germany to a group called the *Unitas Fratrum* and merged this remnant with the Renewed Church of the United

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[10] Thompson, ed., *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, 4.

[11] Lovett H. Weems, *Leadership in the Wesleyan* Spirit (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999), 116.

[12] Weems, *Leadership in the Wesleyan Spirit*, 116.

Brethren, which became the Moravian Brethren.[13] Zinzendorf founded the Moravian settlement. He called it "Herrnhut," meaning "The Lord's Watch," and it became a model for Moravian communities.[14] He sent out small groups of Moravians to start up new communities in other countries. Peter Böhler and August Gottlieb Spangenberg were drawn to Zinzendorf 's passion and joined the movement.[15]

In 1732, James Oglethorpe returned from America after starting a new colony. Upon his return, he met with the Wesley brothers and invited them to travel to Georgia as missionaries.[16] For John, this was not just a voyage to America, it was also a religious experience. A group of Moravians were aboard the ship as well. While at sea, a fierce storm erupted, and it terrified John. As he feared for his life, John was amazed by the faith of his new Moravian friends, who calmly sang praises to God amid the storm. Wesley desired to have that type of assurance of salvation. He realized he was not ready to meet his Maker and felt his faith was deficient and not strong enough to overcome fear. Sometime later, John Wesley was introduced to other influential Moravians, which led him to experience a spiritual awakening. These include Peter Böhler and August Gottlieb Spangenberg. Böhler organized the small groups (bands) for the Moravians spending time in both England and America. Wesley was impressed with his presentation of instant conversion by faith alone and his organizational skills.[17]

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[13] Snyder, *The Radical Wesley,* 28.

[14] Snyder, *The Radical Wesley,* 28.

[15] Snyder, *The Radical Wesley,* 28.

[16] Wesley, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 8.

[17] Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 29.

Peter Böhler sparked a friendship with Charles and John Wesley, and they spent time together in Oxford. After this encounter, Peter Böhler wrote a letter to Zinzendorf that read: "I traveled with the two brothers, John and Charles Wesley, from London to Oxford. The elder, John, is a good-natured man; he knew he did not properly believe on the Savior and was willing to be taught."[18] It was clear to both Böhler and Spangenberg that Wesley was not firm in his faith. During a later conversation, Peter Böhler spoke to Wesley about his experience at sea while traveling to America when the storm arose. They discussed John's lack of assurance, and Böhler expressed to Wesley, "It was not weakness of faith, but plain unbelief, lacking a faith whereby alone we are saved."[19] One either has faith or one does not. There are no degrees of faith. His advice was memorable: "Preach faith till you have it; and then, because you have it, you will preach faith."[20]

Spangenberg further challenged Wesley by asking him the following questions: "Have you the witness within yourself?" and "Does the Spirit of God bear witness with your spirit, that you are a child of God?"[21] Spangenberg further explained that everyone who is born of the Spirit becomes a child of God and "the Spirit bears witness with your spirit, and thus one experiences spiritual adoption in their hearts."[22] The two men

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[18] Snyder, *The Radical Wesley,* 29.

[19] Richard Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2013), 84.

[20] J&D-Wesley, John, *Journal and Diaries*, eds. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater, 7 vols, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988-2003), vols 18-24 of The Bicentennial Edition of The Works of John Wesley.

[21] F. A. J. Harding, "The Social Impact of the Evangelical Revival: A Brief Account of the Social Influences of the Teaching of John Wesley and His Followers," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 15, no. 4 (December 1946): 261, http://www.jstor.org/stable/42971881.

[22] Kenneth J. Collins, and Jason E. Vickers, eds., *The Sermons of John Wesley: A Collection for the Christian Journey* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2013), 186, ProQuest Ebook Central.

continued their conversation about what it meant to know Jesus Christ. When asked if he knew that Jesus died to save him, Wesley responded, "I hope he has died to save me."[23] It is clear from John Wesley's experiences that he felt he was missing a personal relationship with the Lord. He desired to *know* God and not settle for knowing about him.

Aldersgate Street Experience

While at a meeting with the Moravians on Aldersgate Street in London, John heard a reading of Martin Luther's preface to Paul's letter to the Romans. The preface included an explanation of faith and the doctrine of justification, and it described the change in which God works in the heart through faith in Christ.[24] This was a turning point for Wesley and his personal relationship with God; a spiritual shift began to happen.

Wesley notes the importance of this encounter in his journal. The entry for this date of May 24, 1738, reads as follows:

> Wed. May 24. I think it was about five this morning when? I opened my Testament on those words, 'There are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, even that ye should be partakers of the divine nature' (2 Peter 1:4). Just as I went out, I opened it again on those words, "Thou are not far from the kingdom of God." In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate-street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.[25]

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[23] Harding, "The Social Impact of the Evangelical Revival," 261.

[24] Wesley, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 12.

[25] John Wesley, *The Heart of John Wesley's Journal*, ed. Percy Livingstone Parker (New York, NY: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1903), 43.

Wesley's journal reflects God preparing his heart the morning of May 24th for what would take place later that day. His writing reveals the prevenient grace of God working in advance to prepare the way for a divine encounter.

His evening journal entry on this day shows a relationship change with God from knowing about God to knowing God: "After my return home, I was much buffeted with temptations; but cried out, and they fled away. They returned again and again. I as often lifted up my eyes, and He 'sent me help from his holy place' and herein I found the difference between this, and my former state chiefly consisted of."[26] Although this spiritual event was life-changing for Wesley, he still wrestled with sin and doubt, and he desired a deeper relationship and a more personal experience with God. He would receive this experience later during his society gathering with the Fetter Lane Society.

Fetter Lane Society

Wesley, along with others, desired a closer fellowship with God. Due to their yearning, a new band, or small group was formed. This new society met on Fetter Lane on May 1, 1738, and later became known as the Fetter Lane Society.[27] This society played a pivotal role in John Wesley's faith journey and his sense of assurance of salvation. There Wesley had a second and more dramatic life-changing encounter with the Lord.

During the 1730's James Hutton was a key figure in both the Aldersgate Street group and the Fetter Lane Society. He became a link for the Wesley's and the Moravians.

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[26] Wesley, *The Heart of John Wesley's Journal*, 44.

[27] Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 30.

Charles experienced bouts of sickness that were often serious at times. In fact, John and Charles would often stay at the Hutton's home in London when visiting, especially during the period of Charles' sickness.[28] Wesley wrote the following in his journal on May 1, 1738, regarding his brother Charles and his life-threatening illness and miraculous healing:

> The return of my brother's illness obliged me again to hasten to London. In the evening I found him at James Hutton's better as to his health than I expected, but strongly averse from what he called 'the new faith.' This evening our little society began, which afterword met at Fetter-Lane.[29]
>
> Charles suddenly received a miraculous healing and professed faith in Christ.

After witnessing his brother's profession of faith and healing, the event caused John to question his faith and what he was missing. While this led to Wesley's Aldersgate experience, which was significant for assurance and a filial relationship with God, the more dramatic Fetter Lane Society radically altered his state of sanctification and empowerment into all that God wanted for him and the nation. It was the final missing piece for John Wesley. As mentioned, Peter Böhler and other Moravians opened the Fetter Lane Society in England in May of 1738. It was during this time that Wesley and Böhler struck up a friendship. Both John Wesley and Peter Böhler were involved in the creation of this new society at Fetter Lane. It was not a Moravian society, but rather a religious society in connection with the Church of England.[30] The rules for weekly meetings included: prayer, confession, discussion in smaller groups, procedures for new

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[28] Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 31.

[29] Wesley, *The Heart of John Wesley's Journal*, 43.

[30] Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 31.

members, and provision for a once-a-month love-feast from 7:00–10:00 p.m.[31] The focus of the society was salvation and the spiritual health of its members.

A year later, while at a love-feast at the Fetter Lane Society meeting on New Year's Day, John Wesley and approximately sixty others had a life-changing encounter with God. Wesley recorded, "the power of God came mightily upon us, insomuch that many cried out for exceeding joy, and many fell to the ground."[32] His journal entry reflects the events of that day:

> Monday, January 1, 1739. "Mr. Hall, Kinchin, Ingham, Whitefield, Hutchings, and my brother Charles were present at our love-feast in Fetter Lane, with about sixty of our brethren. About three in the morning, as we were continuing instant in prayer, the power of God came mightily upon us, insomuch that many cried out for exceeding joy, and many fell to the ground. As soon as we were recovered a little from that awe and amazement the presence of his majesty, we broke out with one voice, we praise thee, O God; we acknowledge thee to be the Lord.[33]

There was excitement in London over the move of the Holy Spirit at the Fetter Lane Society gathering; revival was beginning. Seven clergy members of the Fetter Lane Society gathered the day after, on January 2, 1739, to strategize how to stoke the fire of revival so it could spread far and wide. Ingham's expectation— "I believe that this year there will be a great work done in England"[34]—proved well founded. Many who were in attendance that night were revival fire starters throughout England. According to

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[31] Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 34.

[32] Podmore, "The Moravians and The Evangelical Revival In England: 1738 – 1748," 33.

[33] John Wesley, *The Bicentennial Edition of The Works of John Wesley,* eds. Albert C. Outler, Frank Baker, Richard P. Heitzenrater, and Randy L. Maddox, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1984), 29.

[34] Podmore, "The Moravians and The Evangelical Revival In England: 1738 – 1748," 33.

Moravian historian J. E. Hutton, the Moravian-inspired Fetter Lane Society was "nothing less than the headquarters for the burgeoning evangelist revival throughout England."[35]

John Wesley's Ministry Post Fetter Lane Society

Spiritual Transformation as a Result of Fetter Lane

Wesley witnessed and experienced a powerful move of the Holy Spirit at Fetter Lane. His journal entries reveal a spiritual change from before to after. Three days following his experience, on January 4, 1739, Wesley made an entry quoting someone's former journal thoughts. Historians say that Wesley is undoubtably referencing himself from a year earlier. Part of his reflection references an embarrassing episode he had at Mr. Hutton's house on May 28, 1738. This entry describes (himself) as someone who lacked faith and did not know the Lord personally. He even describes himself as not a Christian because he lacked the fruits of the Spirit. In the time he wrote the account in 1738, Wesley even questioned having heartfelt emotion of the love of God within him. He was without a sense of peace, and only occasionally experienced joy, but it was not an abiding joy.[36] It appears that since Wesley requoted this, he was making the comparison to how he now felt after the love-feast at Fetter Lane.

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[35] Podmore, "The Moravians and The Evangelical Revival In England: 1738 – 1748," 34.

[36] John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley Volume 19: Journal and Diaries II* (1738–43), eds. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1990), 29–30, https://www.dropbox.com/s/ykjki6gu270d76e/The%20works%20of%20John%20Wesley%20-%20volume%2019.%20Journals%20and%20diaries%20II%2C%201738-43%201755-65%20%E2%80%93%20Wesley%2C%20John%20%20222341387%20%20%23260%20%281%29.pdf?dl=0.

In this next entry, Wesley displays a new discerning spirit as he writes about his experience with two persons who displayed enthusiasm for God but did not speak or live in accordance with the Word of God. Wesley spoke about enthusiasts as people who imagine themselves as Christians but are not. On Wednesday, January 17, 1739, he wrote, "I was with two persons, who I doubt are properly *enthusiasts.* For, first, they think to attain the end without the means, which is *enthusiasm*, properly so called. Again, they think themselves inspired by God, and are not. But false, imaginary inspiration is *enthusiasm*."[37]

In other entries, Wesley expressed a heightened love for God. In one case, he officiated a baptism where the person became born again. He writes that this resulted in an inner transformation according to the deep sense of the love of God now within the person. On another occasion, Wesley met with a group of friends called "the French Prophets." Together they visited a woman who prophesied and spoke strangely with bodily contortions. The group assessed what they witnessed and determined that she spoke by the Spirit of God.[38] The doubt and spiritual struggles that were present in many of Wesley's journal entries before Fetter Laner were no longer present after his Fetter Lane Society experience. One could deduce that Wesley was changed due to the power of the Holy Spirit.

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[37] John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley,* Vol. 19, 29–30.

[38] John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley,* Vol. 19, 33.

Conflict Between Wesley and the Moravians

Wesley was instrumental in starting conversations of how to bring the presence of the Holy Spirit to surrounding communities and within his country so that others could experience the power of God. Nothing tells the story of transformation more than a person advocating for it. There was excitement because revival was spreading. Unfortunately, conflicts arose between John Wesley and the Moravians because they interpreted theology differently. Nonetheless, they shared a bond of Christian friendship, so they continued to meet for daily services at noon and 7:00 p.m.[39] They were committed to their disciplines and spiritual practices. Eventually, the tension grew to be too much, and John split with the Moravians over the controversy of stillness.

The Moravians believed a person who did not have faith should remain still, which meant they should not engage in the same kind of spiritual practices as other believers did during their meetings. These people should also not cry out for the Lord in an emotional manner as if to earn justification for their salvation. The Moravians urged their members to wait submissively for the gift of faith and to refrain from the means of grace (communion, et al.) until they had received it (salvation). This included abstaining from extended prayer and communion.[40]

Wesley rejected this notion. This belief that a person should remain still until they obtained a justifying and regenerating faith was contradictory to what Wesley believed. Wesley believed that the Lord's Supper and other means of grace were converting ordinances. According to Wesley, a person may have some degree of faith before being

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[39] Geordan Hammond, "Versions of Primitive Christianity: John Wesley's Relations with the Moravians in Georgia, 1735-1737," Journal of Moravian History, no. 6 (2009): 59, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41179847.

[40] Podmore, "The Moravians and The Evangelical Revival In England: 1738 – 1748," 35.

born anew in Christ. This meant for Wesley that the means of grace included attending church, receiving the Lord's Supper, fasting, praying, and reading Scripture as outward signs of the inward work of God.[41] Wesley believed these people of little faith could practice the disciplines among the other believers at their meetings as a display of the progress of God working in them. Ultimately, they parted ways due to the issue of holiness.

The split did not affect the powerful move of God that was already occurring. As Howard A. Snyder, author of *The Radical Wesley,* confirms: "The flame was spreading from cell to cell, submerged longings for a fresh taste of spiritual reality were starting to be met. The stir of a new awakening was in the air."[42] John began open air preaching, and it was apparent that his sermons reflected the spiritual change he desired. Now, he preached faith because he had it.

From May of 1745 to 1748, Wesley corresponded with someone named John Smith. Smith challenged Wesley regarding this newfound powerful move of God. According to Cunningham, Wesley felt that everyone born of the Spirit is a child of God. This adoption as a child of God through Christ was not a license to sin, but a relational state to enjoy at all times because in all circumstances, the believer would possess the peace of God that passes all understanding. Smith continued to question Wesley on pneumatology regarding false inspiration.

Wesley believed false inspiration was possible, but he also believed a believer can feel the power of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and it can be authentic. Wesley's definition of

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[41] Kenneth J. Collins, *John Wesley: A Theological Journey* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 110.

[42] Snyder, *The Radical Wesley,* 35.

"feeling" was not synonymous with emotion; rather, it was a broader knowledge-based sensitivity.[43] It can be understood as a spiritual sense of the heart. "Spiritual feeling, which occurred during inspiration, was participation in God's divine reality, and demonstratable proof."[44] It was clear from this exchange with "Smith" that Wesley experienced God in such a way that he had been transformed from knowing about God to knowing and experiencing God throughout his spiritual journey.

Wesley's Teaching and Preaching

According to author Thomas Oden, Wesley taught about the Spirit's work in human transformation. The Spirit works in Scripture as a guide for faith and practice, and to summon into the being the life and mission of the interpreting community.[45] Pentecost changed everything with the promised Holy Spirit being realized in the church. The work of the Holy Spirit is found in the convicting, guiding, comforting, sustaining, and persevering in the empowerment of the laity of the church through core teaching.[46] The Spirit sustains and empowers the faithful and guides them in all truth and paths that lead to a community of faith.

Wesley was met with criticism following his transformative experience when he preached regarding the Holy Spirit. In 1750, he preached the "Nature of Enthusiasm." Enthusiasm was something common, but rarely understood. Methodist Christians were being accused of enthusiasm and were considered beside themselves when they were overcome with

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[43] Cunningham, "*Pneumatology Through Correspondence,*" 28.

[44] Cunningham, "*Pneumatology Through Correspondence,*" 28.

[45] Thomas C. Oden, *John Wesley's Teachings: Christ and Salvation*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 118.

[46] Oden, *John Wesley's Teachings: Christ and Salvation*, 118.

peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Wesley wrote: "But which to all who are saved from real enthusiasm—from merely nominal Christianity—is the wisdom of God and the power of God."[47] He points out in his sermon that every enthusiast is a proper madman, yet his is not an ordinary, but a religious madness. He meant that religion is the spirit of a sound mind and stands in direct opposition to madness of every kind.[48]

In 1746, Wesley preached on the First Fruits of the Spirit based on Romans 8:1. In his message he said those who have been justified by faith have peace with God through Jesus Christ. He made the following declarations in his sermon:

> . . . they who thus believe do no longer walk after the flesh, no longer follow the motions of corrupt nature, but after the Spirit. Both their thoughts, words, and works are under the direction of the blessed Sprit of God. . . . They now walk after the Spirit both in their hearts and their lives, love God and love their neighbor with a love which is a well of water, springing up unto everlasting life. And by him, they are led in every holy desire, into every divine and heavenly temper, till every thought which arises in their heart is holiness unto the Lord. . . . They who walk after the Spirit are also led by him into all holiness of conversation. Their speech is always in grace, seasoned with salt with the love and fear of God.. . . in all their outward behavior to follow him who left us an example that we might tread in his steps; in all their intercourse with their neighbor to walk in justice, mercy, and truth; and whatsoever they do, in every circumstance of life, to do all to the glory of God. . . . These are they who indeed walk after the Spirit. Being filled with faith and with the Holy Ghost, they possess in their hearts, and show forth in their lives, in the whole course of their words and actions, the genuine fruits of the Spirit of God, namely love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, temperance, and whatever else is lovely or praiseworthy.[49]

Wesley beautifully articulates the joy of the Spirit of God and paints a visual of the Spirit-filled life. This sermon reflects the mighty work of God throughout John's

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[47] Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007), 130.

[48] Collins, *The Sermons of John Wesley: A Collection,* 37.

[49] Collins, *The Sermons of John Wesley: A Collection,* 186–188.

ministry and life, and what God promises for the life of every believer. Wesley's sermon on "First Fruits" is a Spirit-filled example that informs this project by illustrating signs of a changed life both inward and outward. God's presence is available for all who love and seek him. When spiritual transformation occurs, there is a renewing of the heart and mind. As a result, believers come to know God more intimately through experiencing his presence.

Conclusion

This analysis shows evidence of the spiritual change witnessed in John Wesley's life and ministry. Though his father was a minister, his mother had the biggest impact on him. Her spiritual disciplines made an impact on John that fostered a passion for religion; the kind of religion that would start a movement and a new church denomination.

Though Wesley was religious, he yearned to know and experience God more intimately. He continually pursued holiness. Throughout his life, John experienced pivotal moments that challenged his faith. While on a voyage to America, he experienced one of those life-changing moments with the Moravians. Wesley was unaware of how much impact the Moravians would have on his life. He feared for his life when that storm arose, but the Moravians' calm and worshipful demeanor left a lasting impression. John desired to have the type of faith and assurance they demonstrated during the storm.

Peter Böhler also had a tremendous influence on John. He was instrumental in mentoring Wesley when he struggled with understanding his own salvation. Their friendship and spiritual bond sharpened John throughout the years. Likewise, Wesley's Aldersgate experience left John feeling strangely warmed, and this led him to continue progressing in his struggle to know God even more. Finally, it was first his experience of

heartwarming at Aldersgate Street that warmed his relationship with God, and then followed the more dramatic and empowering love-feast on Fetter Lane on January 1, 1739, that gave John that tangible experience of knowing God more intimately and powerfully still. Here, a revival started for all of those in attendance.

It was after Fetter Lane that John Wesley began open air preaching, and a new Methodist movement had begun. God used John's willingness as a spark that would set a spiritual fire throughout England. With time, Wesley's sermons became more charismatic with references to the power of the Holy Spirit. Often, he would preach on the difference of knowing about God in contrast to knowing and experiencing the power of God. His sermon named "First Fruits of the Spirit" emphasized the fruit or product that one bears as a result of being touched by the Spirit of God.

Just as Wesley wrestled with his faith and an assurance of salvation, the same may be said of believers today. There exists a hunger and desire to know God more, to have an increased experiential knowledge of God's presence in the joys and challenges of life. Wesley's spiritual journey reflects what is available to believers today for those who desire to know God more. He was vulnerable and authentic in his doubts, but he continued to press on. Wesley was steadfast in prayer and discipline, and he relentlessly pursued God.

Though his Aldersgate experience was a pivotal moment, it was his encounter with the Holy Spirit on Fetter Lane that radically changed his life. This spiritual change was evidenced throughout his teaching and sermons. God's sanctifying grace was evident in Wesley and is present in believers today. Through sanctifying grace, believers grow in

holiness in their spiritual walk to become more like Jesus. It is through a continual work of sanctification through which God continues to reveal himself.

It is evident throughout John Wesley's life that he had significant experiences which transformed his spiritual life. Early in his childhood, he experienced the traumatic event of being trapped in his burning house. He felt as if he was miraculously saved for a purpose. In his adult years, He wrestled with his salvation and lacked a sense of assurance. It was his Aldersgate experience that left his heart strangely warmed and gave him a conviction that he was saved. Nearly a year later, he was still struggling with his faith. He then had a spiritual encounter at the Fetter Lane Society in which he and others participated in a powerful move of the Holy Spirit, and this transformed him into a more convinced Spirit-led believer and leader. Wesley progressed from having a theoretical knowledge of God to an experiential knowledge of God. The theology of such experiences will be explored next.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Many Christians wrestle with understanding the concept of the Holy Trinity and the Holy Spirit. As a result, they lack experience in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. The research in this chapter informed the hypothesis that if a person encounters and experiences the presence of God through the Holy Spirit, then they will come to know him more personally. This chapter focuses on the theology of pneumatology. It will detail the work of the Holy Spirit throughout ancient and modern times. Pneumatology is the study of the Holy Spirit in Christianity. This chapter addresses how pneumatology related to this doctoral project.

The term pneumatology is formed from two Greek words: *pneuma* and *logos*. *Pneuma* means wind, breath, or Spirit. *Logos* means word, matter, or thing.[1] For reference in this chapter, pneumatology will be used to refer to the study of the biblical doctrine of the Holy Spirit, including the nature of the Spirit, the deity of the Spirit, and the work of the Spirit throughout Scripture. The Holy Spirit is active and present in the life of a believer. Many sense the presence of the Holy Spirit through his leadership, guidance, and comfort.

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[1] Daniel Castelo and Kenneth M. Loyer, eds., *T&T Clark Handbook of Pneumatology* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020), 1, ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=6247283.

The manifest presence of the Holy Spirit may be experienced individually and among a community of believers. The Holy Spirit works in the life of a believer for renewal, transformation, and to strengthen a believer for the work of ministry. It is Father God's desire that his sons and daughters obtain a personal relationship with him through the power of his Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, who brought the church into existence, is still guiding and sustaining it and its people.

The Nicene Creed provides a theological framework for understanding the third person of the Trinity. In the creed, a declaration is made using a plural pronoun: "we believe in the Holy Spirit." This statement signals one's participation in the confessing community known as the church.[2] To confess the power and presence of the Holy Spirit is to acknowledge a greater power than oneself. The Father calls and claims a person through the Son, and by the Holy Spirit a person responds in faith.[3] The Nicene Creed identifies the nature of the Christian faith as a community that believes in a triune God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The name Holy Spirit is significant because it signifies the distinctiveness and full deity of this divine person. To be "holy" is to be set apart or distinct; "Spirit" implies wind or breath.[4] God, as also the Holy Spirit, reveals himself through God's Word to establish a relationship with a believer which is manifested through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is present in the work of salvation when a person accepts Christ as their Lord and Savior. A spiritual transaction occurs between a new believer and the Holy

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[2] Castelo and Loyer, eds., *T&T Clark Handbook of Pneumatology*, 2.

[3] Castelo and Loyer, eds., *T&T Clark Handbook of Pneumatology*, 2.

[4] Castelo and Loyer, eds., *T&T Clark Handbook of Pneumatology,* 3.

Trinity in which a supernatural deposit and transformation take place. A person receives a sense of the Holy Spirit and an assurance of peace.

Some say that one of the biggest mysteries of the Christian faith is how a person can claim to know God through revelation. The Latin word *revelatio* suggests the removal of the veil, to reveal what has been hidden. It also infers knowledge.[5] God reveals spiritual knowledge through the Holy Spirit to the life of a believer. This special revelation fosters a spiritually intimate relationship between God and the person so that one might know God more. Spiritual revelation is at the core of the personal nature of God; only he can divinely reveal himself.

The person of the Holy Spirit can be challenging to understand. The Spirit was revealed in a new and indwelling dynamic presence when Jesus was resurrected, ascended, and acknowledged as the Christ, which brings together the mystery of Easter and Pentecost.[6] It is God's salvific act, offered to humanity through the life and sacrifice of Jesus, which gives the Holy Spirit, and is the sign of God's activity brought to fulfillment within the person and work of Jesus Christ.[7] Within the Holy Trinity, Jesus points to the Father and the Holy Spirit points to Jesus. The Holy Spirit does this by guiding a person to understand and know the person of Jesus.

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[5] Owen C. Thomas & Ellen K. Wondra, *Introduction to Theology*, 3rd ed. (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2002), 22.

[6] Helen Bergin, "Pneumatology: Edward Schillebeeckx's Recent Theology," *New Blackfriars* 80, no. 943 (1999), 410, http://www.jstor.org/stable/43250266.

[7] Bergin, "Pneumatology: Edward Schillebeeckx's Recent Theology," 411.

Some may question if it is possible to know God. According to Larry Hart, the fundamental purpose of theology is to help us to know God—not just know about God.[8] For believers, this is the deepest desire of the human heart—to know God in a personal way. It is only in knowing God that one can then enjoy the profound, joyous, and exciting mystery behind the presence of Almighty God.[9] The Holy Spirit works in the life of a believer to heighten the awareness of God in and around a person. As Hart explains it, in American Christianity, believers are encouraged to find a balance between heart religion and head religion. Mark 12:30 instructs believers: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart . . . and with all your mind."[10] God works in the minds of believers by the Holy Spirit to renew their minds and thus awaken their hearts to know him and his kingdom.

It is through the Spirit or *pneuma* that Jesus influences believers and Christian communities. Schillebeeckx states that the Holy Spirit's recollection of the biblical narrative, which is handed down through the church, and the active presence of the Spirit of Christ in the church community, are two sides of one coin.[11] The work of the Holy Spirit is active in a believer when a person allows the history of the living Christ to continue in the present through the Spirit. There would be no church without Jesus or the Holy Spirit; the Spirit is a guide and agent who constantly renews the church.

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[8] Larry D. Hart, *Truth Aflame: Theology for the Church in Renewal*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 21, ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=5397729.

[9] Hart, *Truth Aflame: Theology for the Church in Renewal,* 21.

[10] Hart, *Truth Aflame: Theology for the Church in Renewal*, 22.

[11] Bergin, "Pneumatology: Edward Schillebeeckx's Recent Theology," 415.

John Wesley and Pneumatology

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, experienced assurance of his salvation through the presence of the Holy Spirit. Wesley kept journals which aid modern day Wesleyans to understand his faith journey and encounters with the Holy Spirit. For example, when discussing Wesley in the last chapter it was noted that he recorded the following experience from his engagement at Aldersgate Street:

> In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change that God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death (*J&D*,18:249-50).[12]

From this and many other experiences, Wesley came to believe in two types of senses, natural and spiritual, and that spiritual knowledge is discerned with spiritual senses.[13] It is necessary to have a spiritual hearing ear and a spiritual seeing eye that opens the senses of the soul which foster the ability to experience the evidence of things not seen. These senses are pathways to the invisible world to discern spiritual objects and to furnish a person with ideas of what the outward "eye hath not seen, neither the ear hear."[14] Wesley believed that without these spiritual senses, a person cannot comprehend the divine things from the Holy Spirit.

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[12] Richard Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2013), 88.

[13] Thomas C. Oden, *John Wesley's Teachings: God and Providence*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 113.

[14] Oden, *John Wesley's Teachings: God and Providence*, 113.

According to Wesley, The Holy Spirit "prepares a person for his inward kingdom, whereby the heart and its various tempers and affections are transformed by love. Given the nature of transformation that occurs in the new birth, the Holy Spirit is now resident in the heart in a new way."[15] The Spirit takes residence in a person's heart causing a change in the heart of the believer. Wesley highlighted two important distinctions in what becoming holy entails. The first distinctive is the order of salvation which includes justification and regeneration. The second is making the distinction between works before justification and after, noting the works are good but after regeneration, they are even better by the sanctifying grace by which they arise.[16] It is by the power of the Holy Spirit that a person grows in sanctifying grace. Sanctifying grace is a grace of ever-increasing consecration of the whole person to Christ, producing holiness of heart and activity in a believer.

Wesleyan trinitarian theology is understood as the Triune God constantly working in the heart and lives believers to transform them into the image of God. The three persons of the Trinity carry out their respective duties through cooperative ministry with each other in the divine providence and plan of salvation.[17] From the time a person is first drawn to Christ until the day they are actively engaged in ministry and beyond, the Holy Spirit is at work in the believer making this sanctification happen.

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[15] Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007), 124.

[16] Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace*, 125.

[17] Anna Cho, "Wesleyan Trinitarian Theology and Pneumatology: God's Performative Action," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 78, no. 4 (March 2022): 4, https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i4.7344.

The Holy Spirit is active in the life of individuals and the church. Scripture and church history bear witness to how God renews the church by his Spirit. Some have experienced personal spiritual renewal through a deeper communion with God through the power of the Holy Spirit which has led to a more personal relationship. Humans are created to experience God in all his fullness. Personal renewal is experienced through a spiritual new birth by the deepening work of the Holy Spirit.[18] Corporate renewal is a broader renewing work of the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ, the church. God's Spirit graciously moves over the whole church.

The reality is, some have differing views of pneumology and the presence of the Holy Spirit in the church. Several strands have reduced the Holy Spirit's role, relegating him to a minimalist function in the *ordo salutis*. In Ruthven's book, he shares that Protestant theology has been criticized for being more about Jesus rather than from Jesus.[19] The kingdom of God, including signs and wonders, was an essential part of the ministry of Jesus and his mission to introduce and bestow the Holy Spirit. Jesus came to introduce and model the kingdom and how to live out the New Covenant in spirit, revelation, and power by the facilitation of the Spirit.

The Pneuma in the Old and New Testament

The Holy Spirit is the transforming power, as witnessed in Scripture, who transforms God's people. When God's Spirit dwells in a person, they are born again, and

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[18] Howard A. Snyder, *Signs of the Spirit: How God Reshapes the Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1997), 286.

[19] Jon Mark Ruthvan, *What's Wrong with Protestant Theology? Tradition vs. Biblical Emphasis* (Tulsa, OK: Word & Spirit Press, 2013), 203.

a new identity in Christ is formed. As a result, outward change occurs because there is an inward change of the heart. The Spirit empowers and equips people for ministry. The Spirit of God teaches believers how to share the Gospel with all people. God also gives spiritual gifts (embodiments of the Holy Spirit) to the body of Christ, each unique, that function together for the work of the church. These spiritual gifts were evident in the Old Testament through the prophets, priests, and those God called and equipped to build his Kingdom. The New Testament expanded on the spiritual gifts in specificity and purpose to help all followers of Jesus to embody Christ and edify the body of Christ.

Old Testament Pneuma

The topic of the Holy Spirit has been a challenging discussion in Christian theological tradition. In patristic writings concerning the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit was treated as an addition to the discussion between the coming Messiah and God.[20] The story of creation is found in the Book of Genesis of the Old Testament. In the first chapter, readers are introduced to the Spirit of God: "Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters" (Gen.1:2). Some of the main functions of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament included the creation of the world, the redemption and formation of the people of God, the divine empowerment of Israel's leadership, and the ethics of the people of God. The prophetic books reveal two main aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit which are the manifested ministry of the Holy Spirit and the anticipated ministry of the Holy Spirit.

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[20] Bergin, "Pneumatology: Edward Schillebeeckx's Recent Theology," 409.

In the canon of the Old Testament, the character of God's Spirit is revealed. Israel had engaged in a mixture of worship practices that included a variety of gods. The Israelites were learning to embrace monotheism over polytheism. It was natural to describe God in terms of "spirit" because of the term's several meanings. The Spirit is also depicted as a distinct person in particular references. In the Book of Isaiah, it says "Like cattle that go down to the plain, they were given rest by the Spirit of the Lord" (Isa. 63:14). The image of God's Spirit is mostly associated with activity and movement. It was God's Spirit that empowered God's chosen people to act and speak for him. Individuals were empowered for leadership and prophecy. Prophecies included the coming restoration of Israel and demonstrating the Spirit's ability to provide ethical transformation by empowering God's people to keep His law.[21] The themes of the Old Testament are developed further in the New Testament, including the perception and role of the Holy Spirit.

New Testament Pneuma

The Holy Spirit begins to come out of the shadows and into the light in the New Testament. The New Testament reveals a change in how the Holy Spirit is understood. The Holy Spirit is revealed as a person of the Holy Trinity and is deity. The Holy Spirit is deity because he is the Spirit of God, and of Christ, and proceeds from the Father.[22] The Holy Spirit is held in the same esteem as the Father and Son in the Trinity. The work of

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[21] Craig Keener, "Holy Spirit," in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry, et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), Logos.

[22] Charles F. Pfeiffer, Howard F. Vos, and John Rhea, *The Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1975), 804.

God always involves the three persons of the Trinity. The attributes of the Holy Spirit unveil specific characteristics which include intellect, emotions, and will, while performing actions such as teaching, guiding, and warning.[23] God's Spirit is transformational which empowers God's people to fulfill God's purposes.

As witnessed in the book of Acts, the apostles spent their time preaching and teaching with little time to care for the poor and widows. To solve this dilemma, another echelon of leaders was needed to fulfill this important ministry. This was a pivotal moment in the life of the early church because spiritual leadership began to expand. Seven men were chosen who were known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom.[24] These new leaders were selected first and foremost to be full of the Spirit and then their gifts and abilities. The New Testament not only speaks of God's power but also God's power at work within a person. And as a result, God awakens a person to new understandings and enables a person to do what could not be done on a person's initiative.[25] God's power rests upon those who believe, making a person different from before.

In the Old Testament, the Spirit of God and his presence and power were witnessed in the work of creation, especially as an anointing presence on the messianic king, and the source of inspiration of the prophets to sanctify Israel. Sanctification is a process in which a person grows in the holiness of God. In the New Testament, the power and presence of the Holy Spirit are manifested at Jesus' conception and baptism. The

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[23] Pfeiffer, Vos, and Rhea, *The Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia*, 804.

[24] J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership: Principles of Excellence for Every Believer* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2007), 35.

[25] J. I. Packer, Gary S. Greig, and Kevin Springer, *The Kingdom and the Power: Are Healing and the Spiritual Gifts Used by Jesus and the Early Church Meant for the Church Today?* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1993), 210.

presence of the Holy Spirit is also witnessed at the beginning of his ministry and in the works of healing and miracles. After Christ's resurrection, at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was given to the church community which guides and empowers the church's mission (Acts 2:1–4). When Christ sends the Holy Spirit to dwell in a person, he makes God present in a person, and through the Holy Spirit, a person is joined with God.[26] This is radically different to the Holy Spirit's activity in the OT where he guards the door to our temple. In the NT, Jesus' blood cleanses and makes the human into a host temple for the Holy Spirit to indwell.

The apostle Paul wrote to the early church explaining what the Spirit does when he makes a home in us. In Galatians, Paul explains the fruit of the Spirit, which includes love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (5:22–23). Believers are to embody these qualities as they engage with others in the world as witnesses of Christ. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul also mentions there are different kinds of gifts but the same Spirit who distributes them for works of service. He states,

> Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines. (1 Cor.12:7–11)

Paul continues in 1 Corinthians 12:28–31 to describe other gifts endowed to the body of Christ. Paul concludes this section with a plea to desire the gifts. He writes,

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[26] Thomas and Wondra, *Introduction to Theology*, 224.

> And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? Now eagerly desire the greater gifts.

Just as these gifts were bestowed upon the early church to build up and edify the church, God is still bestowing them through the Holy Spirit today. Each person is given unique gifts that make the body of Christ whole so that it can function properly and to complement one another to the glory of God. Just as a human body needs all its parts in working order to be healthy, the body of Christ needs its people to fulfill their functions by exercising their gifts.

Pentecost

At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit breaks forth in full intensity by launching, empowering, and guiding the church into its mission. The book of Acts reveals the manifestation of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. It is filled with instances of the power and work of the Holy Spirit.

> When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues[a] as the Spirit enabled them. (Acts 2:1–4)

A group of 120 people gathered for prayer when the Holy Spirit filled them and enabled them to speak in languages they had not learned.[27] Then thousands gathered to hear the disciples. Peter spoke and prophesied from the fulfillment of the prophet Joel,

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[27] Jack Deere, *Why I Am Still Surprised by the Power of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020), 169.

> In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men, and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. (Acts 2:17, 18)

Peter and John had been arrested and during their time of confinement, other spiritual manifestations occurred (Acts 4:1–2). When Peter and John gave a report upon their release, those in attendance erupted in extemporaneous prayer. The place they were meeting in was shaken and they were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the Word of God boldly.

Many desire to have this type of prayer meeting today. Deere suggests that the biggest difference between the first-century church and today's church is that the first-century church was a praying church and today's church is a talking church.[28] The supernatural occurrence of Pentecost and its significance in the life of the church is oftentimes overlooked as something that happened thousands of years ago. The fire of the Holy Spirit still burns today and is available to all believers. Believers continue to live in the days after Pentecost.

The Outpouring of the Presence of the Holy Spirit

One of the greatest ways God blesses people is through an outpouring of God's Spirit. God will always be ushering in renewal and refreshing until the day Christ returns. These special times of blessing are often given different names such as revival, outpouring, or renewal. Regardless of the name, these special times encompass a spiritual awakening, each with a different experience. God meets the spiritually hungry who are

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[28] Deere, *Why I Am Still Surprised by the Power of the Holy Spirit*, 172.

devoted to Christ and offers hope to the hopeless. God's mighty works of salvation have transformed the most hopeless situations and broken people. Divine manifestations have been marked by a widespread awareness of God's presence, mercy, and transforming power in the lives of people.[29] God's transformational power has been witnessed for generations which gives hope to current and future generations. God blesses and pours out his Spirit to make himself known. God is a God of revival and of spiritual awakenings. He spiritually wakes up a believer and reveals to them a new understanding of his glory, power, and presence. He offers new opportunities to know him in personal and tangible ways.

Azusa Street Revival

In early April 1906, a revival broke out in a vacant AME church in Los Angeles, as a small gathering of people led by Brother William J. Seymour. Several of those gathered received the baptism of the Holy Spirit which was evidenced by speaking in other tongues.[30] Eyewitness, Frank Bartleman, spoke of his account of the Azusa Street revival and declared that "The meetings were controlled by the Spirit." As a result, news began to spread of what was happening on Azusa Street.[31] People saw the work of the Holy Spirit through manifestations of God's power during their meetings. Anderson quotes an actual account from *The Apostolic Faith*.

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[29] Wesley Duewel, *Revival Fire* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 16.

[30] Joe Creech, "Visions of Glory: The Place of the Azusa Street Revival in Pentecostal History," *Church History* 65, no. 3 (1996): 405, https://doi.org/10.2307/3169938.

[31] Allen Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 187.

> The news has spread far and wide that Los Angeles is being visited with a 'rushing mighty wind from heaven' . . . No instruments of music are used, none are needed. No choir – but bands of angels have been heard by some in the spirit and there is a heavenly singing that is inspired by the Holy Ghost. No collections are taken. No bills have been posted to advertise the meetings. No church or organization is back to it. All who are in touch with God realize as soon as they enter the meetings that the Holy Ghost is the leader.[32]

This revival occurred well over a hundred years ago, yet its impact is still being spoken about today in all areas of academia and the church. This revival bears witness to the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in modern times. In the Azusa Street Revival, it was nothing like a regular church service. God met believers in the gentle moments of worship through authentic and powerful manifestations of the Holy Spirit that cannot be scripted or rehearsed by humans. The Holy Spirit released gifts of the Spirit including speaking in tongues, a prayer language between God and believer. God desires to empower his church with spiritual gifts for mission and ministry.

The Asbury Revival

The Asbury campus in Wilmore Kentucky is home to Asbury University and Asbury Theological Seminary, both rooted in Wesleyan tradition. In February 2023, students were attending a typical chapel service during the school day. As the service was concluding, a small group of students felt convicted by the Holy Spirit to stay for a time for confession and prayer. The Holy Spirit began to fall on the students, and it was apparent God was moving unlike any other time in the chapel. Word quickly began to spread about a powerful move of the Holy Spirit and students and faculty set aside their busy academic schedules to experience the powerful move of God. The revival made

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[32] Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity*, 187.

national news and was covered by top media outlets. People of every age traveled to witness the move of the Holy Spirit for themselves. The Washington Post printed an article about the event:

> The spontaneous Asbury Revival lasted 16 days, 24 hours a day, starting February 9, 2023. The college drew thousands of people from all over the country, attracting groups of students from at least 22 colleges. A testimony was shared in the article in The Washington Post, Lord, let the frame of Your name spread like wildfire. May the world know it was Christ and Christ alone. No other name gets the glory![33]

Several people shared their accounts of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit including Asbury professor, Jason Vickers, who was present during one of the days of the revival and shared this post on his Facebook page:

> The Asbury Revival: A First-Person Account. . . . I had been seated in the auditorium for less than ten minutes when I came to, by which I mean to say when I suddenly found myself having conscious thoughts about my surroundings and about what I was experiencing. The best way I know to put this is to say that it was as though in just a few short minutes, I had completely zoned out. Upon the resumption of deliberative conscious thought, two things stood out to me. First, there was a noticeable lack of tension in my body. I was completely relaxed. There was also a complete lack of mental tension or distraction. My mind was at utter peace. And I had only been there for ten minutes. The second thing I recall thinking is that I could sit here in this chair forever. The desire to linger indefinitely was quite unexpected. I had planned to pop in for a few minutes before returning to work. Suddenly, work was the farthest thing from my mind. . . . In the time that I was there, I could not get over certain distinctive qualities of the atmosphere. The words that came to mind were: gentle, sweet, peaceful, serene, tender, still.[34]

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[33] Amber Ferguson, "Nonstop worship service at Kentucky college set to end after attracting thousands," The Washington Post, last modified February 19, 2023, https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2023/02/18/asbury-university-revival-kentucky/?itid=sr_2.

[34] Jason E. Vickers, "The Asbury Revival: A First-Person Account," Facebook post, February 10, 2023, https://www.facebook.com/jason.vickers.773/posts/pfbid0274p5xxLVQjex42bhrLthTbsgjniSMBrA8KZ9aeVSrSe8ZUYgQKt393SJvcfwFGAtl.

In the Asbury Revival, hearts were warmed by the Holy Spirit, and many felt a sense of assurance, as well as a deep sense of the love of the Father, as they gathered for worship and prayer. The Holy Spirit dwells within believers, giving them a deep knowledge of Christ and his love. Both the Azusa Street and Asbury revivals describe the presence of the Holy Spirit in different ways. For Azusa, the presence of the Spirit was described as rushing wind; Asbury was described as peaceful. The Holy Spirit was powerfully apparent in both accounts. The Holy Spirit is still active today, touching and filling believers just as it was on the first day of Pentecost.

Conclusion

This chapter emphasizes a variety of themes regarding the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Some doubt the charismatic empowerment of the Holy Spirit, believing that such demonstrations of his presence, power, and gifting of the Holy Spirit ceased with the apostles. This chapter reveals that these claims are not true and has highlighted just a few examples of the manifestation of the Holy Spirit. Examples include biblical and modern-day occurrences. Pneumatology is the study of the Holy Spirit in Christianity. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity and can stir hearts, touch souls, guide, direct, and teach. The Spirit can manifest itself in a variety of ways and circumstances. The Holy Spirit can connect the heart of a person to the heart of God.

Scripture reveals the person and the work of the Holy Spirit from the time of creation to Pentecost. The Holy Spirit worked through God's chosen leaders and prophets as God redeemed Israel as witnessed throughout the Old Testament. The power of the Spirit came upon the multitude at Pentecost as many received the Holy Spirit and put

their faith in Christ. Following conversion, God speaks to readers and hearers of his Word, and the Holy Spirit opens the minds of believers to reveal new wisdom and spiritual insight.

The Spirit is active individually and corporately and has the ability to move in and around a person. This movement is witnessed in ancient times and modern times. God can reveal himself like a blowing of the wind or a gentle whisper. God meets a person in their hunger for him for spiritual renewal and in a person's brokenness for restoration. Encountering God in a personal way is transformational.

Spiritual awakenings are a powerful reminder of the presence of God in the world. John Wesley's heart was strangely warmed while hearing a reading of a commentary of the preface to the Book of Romans. This was a moment of assurance for Wesley that he had deeply desired. He was touched again by the Holy Spirit in a more dramatic power encounter later at Fetter Lane, which changed him yet again in his knowledge of God. The Azusa Street Revival was another Spirit-filled event that eyewitnesses said was led by the Holy Ghost. The Asbury Revival caught the attention of a nation as people gathered from all parts of the United States to join others at Asbury University to get a taste of what the Holy Spirit was doing. So many of the testimonies proceeding from these dynamic encounters, individual and corporate, speak of new revelation and understanding of God and his ways.

The work of the Holy Spirit is essential to the project. It is the Holy Spirit who works in a person or group to convict and enlighten, so believers see and understand God in new ways. The focus of the project is for the participants to encounter God in a fresh way that would cause them to know God more intimately. The apostle Paul penned an epistle to the Ephesians asking God to give believers the Spirit of wisdom and revelation

to know God better (Eph.1:17). The purpose of this project is for the participants to experience God through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

This chapter relates to the problem and hypotheses that if a person encounters the presence of God through the power of the Holy Spirit, then they will have a new awareness of God. The project incorporated practices of learning how to hear and sense the Spirit of God and gain a new understanding of how God can speak to a person through Scripture. Participants gained insights into understanding the presence of the Holy Spirit as witnessed in the Bible and testimonies recorded in history.

Evidence is shown throughout the pages of the New and Old Testament of how the Holy Spirit awakens a person to a greater awareness of God in and around them. And as a result, those who engage with Scripture can experience a greater personal awareness of God. Based on the theological understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit the project sought to lead participants to have a greater understanding of the Holy Spirit as witnessed from the time of creation to today, and in their own lives. It was hoped that this would prompt a new and exciting spiritual awakening in them.

The final area of understanding that would be helpful to the project concerns the how God works in the mind to affect such transformation. The Holy Spirit interacts with humans in a dynamic revelatory process through ideas and experiences that are processed by the mind. Neuroplasticity, as a science, provides excellent insights into this very process and how it can be leveraged to dispose a person to encounter God, and so is the research area encountered in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

Through scientific strides, researchers believe that mindfulness and faith have an important impact on the mind. This chapter focuses on the study of neuroscience and, in particular, the study of neuroplasticity. The study of neuroplasticity reveals that the mind can influence the brain and as a result, create new neuro pathways of thinking, thus opening a person to the power and presence of God. This chapter provides an overview of neuroplasticity and the transformational effect it has on the human brain. It also addresses how this development in neuroscience relates to the doctoral project.

Exploring Neuroplasticity

What is Neuroplasticity?

Neuroplasticity is the ability of the brain to change and adapt to differing stimuli. The brain is a complex organ of the human body. Macroscopically, the brain is divided into three unique structures the cerebrum, the cerebellum, and the brainstem.[1] These structures are then divided into additional structures that perform various functions.

[1] Philippe Douyon, *Neuroplasticity: Your Brain's Superpower: Change Your Brain and Change Your Life* (Salt Lake City, UT: Izzard Ink Publishing, 2019), 6.

Neuroscience has proven that the brain can produce new neurons and make new connections; this is a significant development given scientists formerly believed the brain was static and unable to change.[2] Neurons radiate electrical energy that ignites a spark that allows the brain to learn, evolve, and change. The neurons survive and increase because of the impulses they receive from each other. Neuroplasticity is the brain's ability to change its structure, circuits, and chemical composition in response to a change in its environment.[3] Neuroplasticity describes the way the brain's nerve cells, known as neurons, change their structures and connections with each other as a response to different stimuli.

In the early 1940s, it was believed that the early years of a child were the most important. Dr. Benjamin Spock was a leading voice in the theory that once the brain was fully wired, it could no longer learn new things.[4] In the early 1990s and 2000s, researchers began publishing their findings on adult neuroplasticity and the impact it would have on psychology.[5] Scientists began to shift their understanding of how the mind influenced the brain and, as a result, challenged the research of Dr. Spock.

Neuroplasticity was initially discovered as researchers sought to find a way to help stroke victims regain physical abilities that were lost due to brain damage.[6] It was

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[2] Shad Helmstetter, Ph.D., *The Power of Neuroplasticity* (Gulf Breeze, FL: Park Avenue Press, 2013), 13.

[3] Mark A. Maddix, and Dean G. Blevins, eds., *Neuroscience and Christian Formation* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, Inc., 2017), 45, ProQuest eBook, htttp://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=4744476.central.

[4] James T. Summerhayes, "Twisted Thoughts and Elastic Molecules: Recent Developments in Neuroplasticity," *Brigham Young University Studies* 40, no.1 (2010): 160, http://www.jstor.org/stable/43044769.

[5] Summerhayes, "Twisted Thoughts and Elastic Molecules," 161.

[6] Helmstetter, Ph.D., *The Power of Neuroplasticity*, 13.

through this medical discovery that researchers learned that the brain had the ability to rewire and retrain itself. Researchers believe that what goes on in the mind and in one's life, changes the brain physically. That is, the structure of the brain changes when a person thinks or does something repeatedly.[7] The discovery of neuroplasticity has radically changed the way scientists understand the brain. In a further study of stroke patients, Norman Doidge explained that it was once believed that the brain was fixed, unable to change. As a result, any data that revealed any potential change in the brain was disqualified. Furthermore, if patients showed improvement, doctors viewed the improvement as a misdiagnosis.

Doidge, a psychologist and psychoanalyst, believes the brain has always been plastic and, therefore, has the ability to change itself.[8] His research revealed that stroke patients exhibited improvement through the repeated messages the mind sent to the brain by way of creating new communication pathways within the brain. Brain tissue is like muscle tissue that requires and responds to stimulation. If one does not use it, one loses it. To understand this further, Doidge shares a metaphor of skiing in snow:

> Neuroplasticity is like snow on a hill in the winter. If you go down the mountain to go skiing the first time, because it's a virgin hill, you can take almost any path you want, keeping in mind that there are trees here and rocks there. But, you've got many degrees of freedom as you go down the hill. And being human, if you had a good run the first time, the next run might be very close to that. And if you keep that up, you'll develop tracks in the snow because it's plastic. And, if you keep it up, they'll become ruts. And then you can't get out of it. The plastic paradox is that it's the same plasticity that gives rise to our flexibility in terms of

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[7] Helmstetter, Ph.D., *The Power of Neuroplasticity*, 14.

[8] Norman Doidge, "The Brain That Changes Itself: Neuroplasticity in Clinical Practice," directed by Psychotherapy Networker, 2012, eVideo, https://video-alexanderstreet-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/watch/the-brain-that-changes-itself-neuroplasticity-in-clinical-practice/transcript?context=channel:why-neuroscience-matters-concrete-strategies-for-your-practice.

> our options when we choose to do something for the first time that also gives rise to rigidity.[9]

This research of Doidge and of others reveal that the brain can be reshaped through repeated behavior. Rigid pathways of thinking can reform. Parts of the brain that have been damaged even allow other parts of the brain to function in new ways that provide stroke and brain damaged individuals with the ability to regain what was lost.

Researchers, doctors, and scientists believe that neuroplasticity also has the ability to help those who struggle with anxiety or obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). Doidge believes that worry begets worry because neurons that fire together wire together.[10] His observations revealed that patients experience small subtle ways in which they ramp themselves up into more anxiety. In his interaction with patients, he shared the plastic paradox of the brain and how they could make themselves even more anxious during the course of a session by ramping up the brain in recalling everything that causes them anxiety. He was also able to show that these same patients have the ability, through rewiring the brain, to ramp themselves down.

Educators are discovering the link between literacy and neuroplasticity. Jeffery Wilhelm believes that anyone can learn applicable concepts or processes if they are provided with a meaningful situation with proper support. Brain researchers believe literacy is an enormous human achievement. Because of cognitive fluidity, learning to

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[9] Doidge, "The Brain That Changes Itself," eVideo.

[10] Doidge, "The Brain That Changes Itself," eVideo.

read is complicated. Learning to read requires guidance and lots of practice. “Learning to read requires the transforming of the brain so it can learn to read.”[11]

In his experience of working with international students, he witnessed firsthand how students adapt to new cultures by developing new language and reading skills. The brain can grow new neural networks necessary to change and acquire new brain connections. God designed human beings to learn. If students engage in stimulating and challenging learning environments, their brains can grow which will allow them to become better thinkers, readers, and writers. Wilhelm challenges educators to also expand their brains by trying new approaches to stimulate and encourage growth.[12]

Daniel Goleman is a psychologist and researcher of emotional and social intelligence. Discoveries in neuroscience reveal that the design of the human brain is to be sociable and engage one’s brain with another persons’ brain. Neural linkups with other people stir up emotions and feelings that continually reset key aspects of the brain. These feelings impact hormones and the biological and immune systems within the human body. Positive relationships have the ability to provide health benefits to the body just as toxic ones also take a toll on the body.

Psychologists and neuroscientists are learning new details of the brain due to MRI brain imaging machines. They are able to see how the brain lights up as a result of human interaction. The social brain is the sum of the neural mechanisms that orchestrate a person’s thoughts and feelings. Social interaction plays a role in reshaping the brain

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[11] National Council of Teachers of English, “Literacy and Neuroplasticity: Transforming Our Perspectives and Ourselves,” *Voices from the Middle; Urbana* 17, no. 4 (May 2010): 37–40, https://www.proquest.com/docview/213930012/fulltextPDF/5FC1E704D2744438PQ/1?accountid=202487.

[12] National Council of Teachers of English, “Literacy and Neuroplasticity,” 37–40.

through neuroplasticity. Key relationships can gradually mold certain neural circuits and as a result, over time, refresh the brain.[13]

The brain is continually rewiring itself by imprints that are repeatedly made on it through a person's experiences, emotions, self-talk, and attitudes. Neural pathways are created through the repetition of thoughts. The repeated messages that are given to the brain either form a new neural pathway or reinforce an already existing pathway. Helmstetter offers an illustration by comparing the brain to building roads. He said, "In time, in the brain, with enough repetition, pathways become roads, roads become highways, and with a lot of repetition, highways become superhighways."[14] These roads are neural networks that hold a person's beliefs, attitudes, and opinions. The brain is continually formed and re-formed. As the brain forms new pathways, it transforms the mind with repeated messages. The brain is also able to prune neural pathways that are no longer being used. Again, as the popular phrase goes, "use or lose it."[15]

Neuroscientists contend that spirituality occurs within the physical body of a person. They believe that the spiritual dimensions of a person's life are embodied and embedded in the body.[16] Spiritual embodiment is exhibited in the biology of humans. It impacts how the brain functions and processes both cognitively and behaviorally. Embodied beliefs influence the understanding of some aspects of spirituality. Embedded

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[13] Daniel Goleman, *Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships* (New York, NY: Bantam, 2006), 10, https://search-ebscohost-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=745712&site=ehost-live.

[14] Helmstetter, Ph.D., *The Power of Neuroplasticity*, 47.

[15] Helmstetter, Ph.D., *The Power of Neuroplasticity*, 59.

[16] Maddix, and Blevins, eds., *Neuroscience and Christian Formation,* 37.

spiritual beliefs come in the form of experiences, core beliefs, and practices. These embedded spiritual beliefs shape the brain which can enhance the well-being of a person.

Spirituality is embedded in the physical, cultural, and social being of a person and, as a result, has an impact on one's Christian formation. Christian communities are critical in Christian formation and one's personal spiritual journey. Communities are both physical and spiritual. Many people experience healing, renewal, and spiritual transformation as a result of being in a Christian community. Christian spirituality is both individual and corporate and most often lived out in the community of the body of Christ. By being in a Christian community people are both influenced and are influencers through their beliefs and behaviors that affect others. Many churches offer small groups that help believers grow together and grow in their faith and relationship with God.

Neuroscientists believe that emotions are embedded within the neural networks and entangled with fields of energy.[17] These emotions impact both the outward behavior and the inner thoughts and feelings of a person. Neuroscientists also have learned that the human brain has the capacity to rearrange a person's thought patterns and can be changed through the brain's adaptive abilities in creating new neurological pathways. Many are skeptical about the relationship between science and religion. Yet, there is evidence of the impact of religious practices on the brain, which lines up with neuroplasticity's findings. Educators have a new approach to Christian formation including an ecclesiology with integrated communal practices.[18] Regular participation in religious practices has the power to heal, renew, and change the brain.

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[17] Maddix, and Blevins, eds., *Neuroscience and Christian Formation*, 40.

[18] Maddix, and Blevins, eds., *Neuroscience and Christian Formation,* 41.

Neuroinfluence is a new term that suggests everything impacts the brain's development. This includes internal and external stimuli which affect the makeup of the brain and its anatomy.[19] The brain has the ability to create new neurons, strengthen existing connections, and prune cells. It is suggested that the brain can be formed to some degree in both positive and negative ways. A positive neuroinfluence promotes neurogenesis which builds new networks that help the brain evolve and learn new skills and acquire new knowledge. It opens new pathways and provides the ability to process new ideas, skills, and critical thinking. Positive neuro influence has a constructive impact on the development of the human brain. In contrast, negative neuroinfluence consists of things that impair or destroy neurons including drugs or alcohol.[20] Other contributors include traumatic brain injury, stress, and negative neuro influences among others.

Mindfulness and Meditation

Neuroplasticity and mindfulness create an awareness of the things that both have positive and negative effects on a person's thinking. Mindfulness is conscious awareness that sharpens one's thoughts, behaviors, and actions. It is a complex mental process that involves changes to cognition, sensory perception, affect, autonomic activity, and hormones.[21] Being mindful brings an awareness of the things that influence the brain while building new networks and changing structures.[22] Mindfulness keeps a person in

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[19] Douyon, *Neuroplasticity: Your Brain's Superpower,* 27.

[20] Douyon, *Neuroplasticity: Your Brain's Superpower, 29.*

[21] Maddix, and Blevins, eds., *Neuroscience and Christian Formation,* 47.

[22] Douyon, *Neuroplasticity: Your Brain's Superpower,* 81.

the present moment and helps give a person the ability to let go of the past, and not worry about the future. Being mindful of one's mental, physical, and emotional condition allows a person to focus on what needs the most attention.

Researchers believe that regularly engaging in Scripture meditation and reflection has the ability to change a person's inner reality or core beliefs because the brain will take what is meditated upon as real, even if it differs from what is perceived in the world.[23] The brain has the ability to change its structure in response to a person's experience. When a person lives by what they meditate upon and not what is seen in the world, it becomes a core belief.

Scripture meditation has the power and ability to bring about a transformational change of core beliefs in one's heart. Neuroscientists, Merzenich and deCharm, believe that what a person chooses to think about and meditate upon will direct who they become in the future and that it also has the ability to sculpt the ever-changing mind.[24] This research gives a whole new meaning to "changing one's mind" when a decision needs to be made. When a person makes a commitment to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, something occurs in the mind to declare that decision. It is a literal change of one's mind from one way of thinking to another. It is a decision of both the head and the heart.

A landmark study done by Franciscan nuns and Buddhist monks among those who engaged in mindful meditation and centering prayer revealed that these practices made profound and permanent changes in a person's consciousness and perception of the

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[23] Maddix, and Blevins, eds., *Neuroscience and Christian Formation*, 61.

[24] Maddix, and Blevins, eds., *Neuroscience and Christian Formation,* 61.

world.[25] Research further indicated that these practices promote spiritual growth and development. While prayer and meditation have been widely viewed as beneficial in the religious faith traditions, it is now believed to offer health benefits such as decreasing anxiety, depression, and irritability.[26] It has also been shown to increase feelings of vitality, rejuvenation, and emotional stability. Contemplative and meditational practices increase the capacity for spiritual growth while enhancing the neurocircuitry for improving medical and psychological health.

Patterns began to emerge between the new understanding of neuroplasticity and religious practices. Dr. Jonathan Haidt focused his work on universal moral ideas found in ancient religions and reinterpreting them with modern research in positive psychology and neuroscience.[27] As a result, *The Happiness Hypothesis* was born. Though a self-proclaimed atheist, Haidt could see the link between religion and this new psychology. For the believer, he explains, "there is something that satisfies the soul in seeing the teachings of Jesus and Paul supported by verifiable research."[28] Haidt also asserts that Christians are battling between two forces in the brain, the earthly world and the spiritual world. His research shows that focused prayer and religious meditation can influence the brain's activity to send the emotions of happiness. These feelings of happiness lead to the emotions of joy, a joy that is found in the Lord.[29]

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[25] Kirk A. Bingaman, *The Power of Neuroplasticity for Pastoral and Spiritual Care* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014), 56, ProQuest eBook Central.

[26] Bingaman, *The Power of Neuroplasticity for Pastoral and Spiritual Care,* 56.

[27] Summerhayes, "Twisted Thoughts and Elastic Molecules," 162.

[28] Summerhayes, "Twisted Thoughts and Elastic Molecules," 162.

[29] Summerhayes, "Twisted Thoughts and Elastic Molecules," 162.

The Influence of Neuroplasticity

In Helmstetter's book, *The Power of Neuroplasticity*, he shares a profound insight: "You are creating at this moment, the person you're going to become tomorrow, and you are physically wiring that person into your brain."[30] The brain is designed to change throughout a person's lifetime and is constantly rewiring itself. Researchers have learned that a person's conscious intention has the ability to increase a person's brain's capacity to wire in new ideas.[31] God continually reveals himself to a person by opening the human mind. It is through the rewiring and opening of the mind that a person has the ability to see new opportunities and new perspectives.

Helmstetter offers an additional helpful example of the brain through a metaphor of a computer. The basic computer represents the physical brain, and the software represents the neural pathways, known as computer programs. The computer operator is the person who has a conscious, thinking mind, and finally the silent controller is the brain's autopilot.[32] The silent controller is the subconscious mind which consists of feelings and often predetermines a person's actions and unconscious responses that are made up of thousands of neural pathways that the brain has already recorded and stored. The silent controller can work for or against a person.[33] It becomes the default mechanism when mental and emotional challenges occur.

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[30] Helmstetter, *The Power of Neuroplasticity*, 11.

[31] Helmstetter, *The Power of Neuroplasticity*, 13.

[32] Helmstetter, *The Power of Neuroplasticity*, 78.

[33] Helmstetter, *The Power of Neuroplasticity*, 79.

He shares seven elements for wiring positive programs in the mind. They include Mindfulness, choices, intention, focus, repetition, emotion, and belief.[34] They each begin with what takes place in the mind and for them to take effect, a person has to actually think about them. Applying these elements allows a person to have self-control rather than just random thoughts or engaging in old ways of thinking. As a result, the right thoughts will influence the right actions.

Helmstetter offers twelve positive attributes that should be wired into every human being; one of them is an attitude of spiritual well-being. One of the roles of the brain is to help the body, including helping a person engage spiritually through the mind. He suggests embodying an attitude of spiritual well-being and enlightenment will increase how a spiritual person will feel. In his experience, he has found the most successful, self-fulfilled, and happiest people report that an important part of their lives comes from their spiritual life.[35]

Faith and the Mind

Dr. Caroline Leaf is a leading voice in the study of the power of neuroplasticity. Her research specializes in the connection between the mind and body and how it relates to thinking, learning, and renewing the mind. Dr. Leaf has authored several books, written journal articles, and has her own podcast, all of which focus on the power of the mind. In Dr. Leaf's book *Switch On Your Brain, The Key to Peak Happiness*, *Thinking, and Health,* she refers to the science of quantum physics. Quantum physics can be

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[34] Helmstetter, *The Power of Neuroplasticity*, 91.

[35] Helmstetter, *The Power of Neuroplasticity*, 204.

understood as the nature of particles that make up matter and the forces with which they interact.[36] Quantum physics, neuroscience, and neuroplasticity are steppingstones in the development of understanding God. God has created everything, including science, and through science, he is taking people through the material world into a spiritual world so that a person may grow in experiential knowledge of him.

Dr. Leaf outlines the basic components of quantum physics which include free will, directed attention as the result of choice, and the effects and consequences of these choices. These components can be related to faith and belief in a person; if someone aligns their thinking and subsequent choices with God, they will come to know God more intimately because the Bible is God's word and has the power to transform lives. Therefore, when believers intentionally choose to attend to God's Word, they have the ability to know God more. Both the body and mind have the capacity to change by hearing God through the Bible and having the ability to recall Scripture.[37]

The law of engagement in quantum physics states that relationship is the defining characteristic of everything in space and time, the entanglement of atomic particles being independent of distance, requiring no physical link.[38] As a result, everything and everyone is linked with the ability to affect each other. Believers are connected as the body of Christ and have influence and affect one another because of a common divine sense of purpose. This holy entanglement can change DNA molecules of the individual

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[36] Richard Webb, "Quantum Physics," New Scientist Ltd., accessed September 2, 2023, https://www.newscientist.com/definition/quantum-physics/.

[37] Dr. Caroline Leaf, *Switch On Your Brain: The Key to Peak Happiness, Thinking, and Health* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 106.

[38] Leaf, *Switch On Your Brain: The Key to Peak Happiness, Thinking, and Health*, 110.

and others. Faith and belief have the ability to become a part of a person's DNA. Science is a way God shows a person that they are in him, and if they follow him and his Word, there are physical, emotional, and mental benefits. Dr. Leaf believes that by developing and training a person's intelligence, they can be good at understanding how to practice the presence of God.[39]

In Dr. Leaf's podcast, "Cleaning up the Mental Mess," she interviewed neurosurgeon and founder of the Michigan Neurosurgical Institute PC, Dr. Avery Jackson.[40] Dr. Jackson is a medical doctor and a man of faith. In this interview, he shared his personal testimony and the testimonies of others. He regularly engaged in the practice of praying for his patients at home prior to surgery. One day, however, Jackson was convicted of Scripture that says if one does not acknowledge Christ before men, Christ won't acknowledge them before the Father (Matt. 10:32). As a result of the impression he felt from the Lord, Jackson changed his prayer routine and said that 99% of his patients welcomed his in-person pre-surgical prayers.

Dr. Jackson said that a study showed that people who were encouraged before surgery, who embraced a fighting spirit and who were hope-filled, had better surgical outcomes. He referred to an article in the *New England Journal of Medicine* where a doctor spent ten minutes with a patient who did not engage in eye contact or physical touch while another doctor spent the same amount of time with a patient, looked them in the eye, and had physical touch. The second patent felt like the doctor spent more time

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[39] Leaf, *Switch On Your Brain: The Key to Peak Happiness, Thinking, and Health*, 106.

[40] Dr. Caroline Leaf, "The Power of the Mind," January 16, 2018, in Cleaning Up the Mental Mess, Apple podcast, episode #2, https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/cleaning-up-your-mental-mess-with-dr-caroline-leaf/id1334767397?l=nl.

with them and the quality of the care was better. He referred to another study of the impact of optimism in a patient who is undergoing major stressors in life. The results of patients who embraced an optimistic good attitude recovered better and had better outcomes with health issues including heart, cancer, and fertility. Leaf suggests that it's not just positive thinking, but it is a mind shift that prepares the body for healing. The mind makes the decision for what happens in the brain. Good thoughts are good and negative thoughts are harmful and affect the body accordingly. Dr. Jackson said that attitude is critical. If a person says, "This surgery is going to help me," they have less pain and better results post-surgery.[41] Mind training aids in health recovery. Dr. Jackson professes to be led by the Lord and uses the mind of Christ and the wisdom of God during surgery in order to have the best outcome possible.[42]

Christian identity is important for followers of Christ. In Dr. Caroline Leaf's book, *The Perfect You, A Blueprint for Identity*, she unpacks the mental, physical, and spiritual aspects of a person. Each person is unique in the way they distinctively think and specifically feel and the choices they make. She states that the "perfect you" is a reflection of God, which shapes the believer's identity and purpose as a custodian of his creation and glory.[43] Mindful decisions and thoughts based on a person's identity in Christ produces the possibility to unlearn toxic thoughts and as a result, free the mind.

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[41] Leaf, "The Power of the Mind," https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/cleaning-up-your-mental-mess-with-dr-caroline-leaf/id1334767397?l=nl.

[42] Dr. Caroline Leaf, *The Perfect You: A Blueprint for Identity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2017), 284.

[43] Leaf, *The Perfect You*, 37.

Through the science of neuroplasticity, the brain is changed by the mind which is exhibited through a change in thoughts, words, and actions.[44]

In today's society, many struggle to find their identity, and often seek it in all the wrong places. Leaf points out that each person needs to find their own image because if they don't the world will brand it for them.[45] The story of the Israelites can be found in the pages of the Old Testament. It reveals how they exchanged their identity in God as his image bearers, for the image of the golden calf. They are an example of humans trying to be who God did not create them to be. Instead, it is through loving God and being formed in his Word that a person begins to see the image of God formed inside of themselves in progressive ways. This is the discovery of their true identity in the right place.

Spiritual mindfulness is important in developing the perfect you according to Leaf. Being mindful of the Holy Spirit is critical in how one navigates the circumstances of everyday life. Studies have also shown religious and spiritual experiences impact genes that relate to the brain's dopamine and serotonin transmitters, which creates a religious or spiritual experience in a person. It is important to engage in spiritual mindfulness training and to consult with the Holy Spirit each day to renew mindsets and redirect reactions and behavior.[46] The Holy Spirit guides, but it takes the intentionality of a person to listen and make corrections in any thinking or feeling that is not of God. Consistent dialogue with the Holy Spirit is vital to a person's mental, physical, and

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[44] Leaf, *The Perfect You*, 285.

[45] Leaf, *The Perfect You,* 35.

[46] Leaf, *The Perfect You,* 93.

spiritual health. Spiritual mindfulness improves insight and self-regulation and the ability to access the nonconscious thoughts in the mind as they relate to God. It also creates an awareness of toxic thoughts but with the ability to learn new healthy thinking habits.

God created humans for love and to be his image bearers. Life can be unpredictable at times, and sometimes this unpredictability negatively impacts a person. Yet each person has the power to choose how to respond. When a person understands how and why they react, including thoughts and feelings, they have the choice to respond differently thus transforming their mind (Rom.12:2). New neuro pathways are created as a result of responding and thinking differently.

For decades, neuroscientists have been fascinated by the influence of religious experiences and the effect they have on the brain. Author Mark Pretorius points out that hundreds of clinical cases and neuroimaging studies have concluded that the amygdala, large portions of the prefrontal lobe, and anterior temporal cortex are repeatedly stimulated when engaged in the expression of religious experience.[47]

Pretorius holds the belief that within spiritual experiences, God, by the inherent presence of his Holy Spirit in believers, works within the transmitters of the brain to manifest spiritual experiences. Religious experiences are phenomenological by nature and are initiated by God, and so hold value and purpose to spark spiritual transformation. This spiritual transformation happens through the science of neuroplasticity which creates a change in the way a person thinks and behaves. Spiritual transformation is achieved by

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[47] Mark Pretorius, "Is Neuroscience Challenging the Pentecostal View of Spiritual Experiences and Practice?" Special Edition, *Conspectus: The Journal of the South African Theological Seminary* (December 2018): 153, https://journals.co.za/doi/epdf/10.10520/EJC-156446704e.

the ministry of the Holy Spirit through spiritual experiences and practices that transform a person's thinking toward God. The brain has the capacity to be transformed through neuroplasticity with the ability to form new neural pathways and altering thoughts and behaviors as a response to stimuli. Pretorius states if the neurological change is accelerated by stimuli, it is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit working within the neurotransmitters in the brain.[48]

Conclusion

In the book of Romans, the apostle Paul spoke of the importance of renewing and transforming the mind. Early Christians knew that God had the power to transform the mind, but now modern science has proven this by way of neuroplasticity. Neuroplasticity shows that people have the ability to create new pathways of positive thinking and close pathways of harmful thinking. The mind influences the brain in both positive and negative ways. God's spirit can also help open the mind to new ways of thinking which foster spiritual growth and an experiential relationship with him. Through new neural pathways, a person can have transformational personal encounters with God. This research on the power of neuroplasticity will inform the doctoral project by highlighting scientific research that supports the ability of the brain to change through the power of the mind, and thus allowing for transformational change of one's entire being.

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[48] Pretorius, "Is Neuroscience Challenging the Pentecostal View of Spiritual Experiences and Practice?", 154.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Introduction

In engaging in the Doctor of Ministry project, my goal was to learn how transformative discipleship practices may affect a person's experiential knowledge of God with a result of knowing him more. The foundation chapters present a strong biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary basis for understanding the presence of God through Scripture, John Wesley's experiences among others, theology of the Holy Spirit, and through how the brain can change and adapt to God's thoughts, ideas, and words as the mind apprehends them by the agency of the Holy Spirit. Many believers settle for knowing about God instead of also experiencing him personally through encounters with his presence. God created us to know him personally and transformative discipleship practices such as the ones suggested in this project assist believers to know him more in this way. As a result of putting these discipleship methods into practice, believers experience a spiritual awakening.

In Ephesians 1:17–19, the text chosen for this project, the Apostle Paul prays for believers to gain the Spirit who brings wisdom and revelation to know God better. This Scripture passage was chosen for this project because it reflects a desire for believers to experience God in a deeper way; to experience a spiritual awakening. Paul describes his desire for the eyes of the heart to be opened to the hope one has in Jesus, for the riches of

Christ's glorious inheritance to be understood, and the power that is available to those who believe be personally experienced. This prayer reveals Father God's heart and his desire for his children to be in relationship with him, not to merely ascend to a knowledge of his existence and attributes.

John Wesley was raised in a Christian home. His father was a preacher and his mother devoted herself to spiritual practices, particularly prayer. This spiritual foundation influenced Wesley's life and faith. He formed Christian societies that fostered fellowship, accountability, and holiness. Later, when he and others set sail to America, a storm arose, and Wesley feared for his life. This life-changing experience caused him to examine his faith, resulting in him embarking on a deeper spiritual journey of knowing God.

This experience caused Wesley to wrestle with his faith and question whether he was really saved. Wesley explains that it was his Aldersgate experience in which he felt a touch from the Holy Spirit. He described this moment as when his heart was strangely warmed, and he felt a sense of assurance of his salvation. This was a pivotable moment for Wesley. Aldersgate Day is celebrated in the Methodist tradition today because it reminds believers of the goal of a believer's faith: to personally encounter God's Spirit in a way that transforms the heart and assures one of their salvation.

Eventually, Wesley found himself at another crossroad in his Christian experience. Wesley later explained that he considered himself "almost Christian," which many people today probably also identify with. It was his experience at Fetter Lane where he no longer considered himself in the "almost" category of Christianity. He, along with others, experienced a mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit that night when revival broke out at Fetter Lane. Wesley was touched by the Holy Spirit in a powerful way. He

explained it as a "baptism of fire." Evidence of his spiritual transformation by the power of God was witnessed in his preaching and confirmed with signs and wonders including healing, deliverance, and a tangible presence of God.

Little is heard about the baptism of the Holy Spirit among Methodists. In fact, many know very little of Wesley's encounter at Fetter Lane. Wesley's theology of grace is a hallmark of Methodism. This includes concepts such as prevenient grace— "God comes before,"—justifying grace, forgiveness of sins, receiving a new identity in Christ, sanctifying grace, and growing in grace and faith. While Wesley's theology is foundational to Methodist beliefs, these concepts need to be explained and expounded upon to the believer. Salvation needs to be clearly taught and spiritually understood.

Becoming a believer is not only about professing Christ as Lord and Savior but living a surrendered life to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Many believers embrace a theology of grace and a profession of faith, but they lack or struggle with surrender. Just as God's power fell upon Wesley, his power and presence can—and God desires that it would—fall on us today. This power and presence manifest themselves through preaching, convicting, healing, deliverance, and miracles.

The challenge of this project was for participants to gain experiential knowledge of God and thus come to know him more through transformational experiences and teachings that were new. The project consisted of a six-week curriculum that met for classes on Sunday afternoons for two hours. A time commitment was required of the participants. Many attended a worship service in the morning and our class in the afternoon. The project included individual interviews, a focus group, pre- and post-

questionnaires, and weekly journal entries with thought-provoking questions about their[1] experiences with God.

My role as pastor and spiritual leader is to shepherd the people in my flock, and to help them grow into a more authentic and mature relationship with God. This deeper relationship with God includes understanding Scripture, hearing God's voice, and seeing and sensing God in varying ways, which includes growth in discernment for self and the church. My goal was to facilitate space where believers could testify to a deeper relationship that reflects knowing Jesus more, becoming like him, and making Jesus known to others as a result. As I led this coursework, I walked beside people to encourage and edify them in their faith as they grew in a relationship with God, the Father, Jesus, our Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit, our Counselor. My objective was to participate in facilitating a great awakening for the Kingdom of God in my church and community.

Methodology

This doctoral project title was, "Keys to Unlock Your Relationship with God." The class combined teaching and a hands-on practicum, which included various practical and spiritual exercises. I hypothesized that if a person is led through a six-week discipleship process they will undergo an increase in their experiential knowledge of God. They would gain spiritual knowledge which would foster greater understanding and openness to new discipleship methods that would impact their relationship with God. The

[1] While used occasionally above, plural pronouns will be used throughout this chapter to refer to individuals as well as collectives for the purpose of protecting participants' anonymity.

end goal was that participants would know God more personally and thus bear fruit of the Holy Spirit through testimonies, increased awareness of God's presence, a sense of assurance, a filling of God's love or empowerment for ministry in the Kingdom of God.

The vision for the class coursework was to bring people together who desired and hungered for greater relationship with God, and to create an environment for participants to encounter God in new and more personal ways. Class participants attended Lindenwald Community Church and had a foundational theology and practice of Methodism. Many participants were familiar with Wesley's Aldersgate experience but learning about Wesley's Fetter Lane experience brought a new excitement and understanding of our Wesleyan charismatic roots. This class was unique in that it provided information followed by application that led to transformation. The application part of the class fostered opportunities for the participants to engage with the presence of God through applying what they learned.

During week four, two guests, David and Reverend Doctor Madeline Henners, joined us to offer prophetic and healing prayers following a teaching on pneumatology. Rev. Dr. Madeline Henners is an Elder in the Global Methodist Church. Her presence brought a sense of connection between Wesley's experiences and the denomination's charismatic roots. It helped persons to see how their denomination came to value certain activities and tenets of faith in the Methodist Church today. Some of these church practices seem modern day to our congregants, but they have been around for decades. Each week, the coursework built upon the material from the week before.

In planning the coursework, I focused on components that I presented as "keys" for participants to unlock in their relationship with God. These included teachings that

coincided with the method/application parts of the coursework and the table discussion with others. Each class started with prayer and worship. We sang two hymns that prepared our hearts to encounter the Lord. Greg Albright was our song leader for worship, and he encouraged the participants to sing as if it were a personal prayer being sung unto the Lord. We welcomed the presence of the God each week, and many were touched by the Holy Spirit as they sang hymns. I offered a recap of the previous week's teaching and practicum before introducing the new teaching each week.

The biblical teaching from the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Ephesians connected Paul's prayer to the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer.

> I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength. (Eph.1: 17–19)

This teaching on the Ephesians passage provided an essential framework for what was being offered in my class and for unlocking the participants' relationship with God through the keys that were being taught. Many experienced an increase in wisdom, revelation, and enlightenment, and they grew in experiential knowledge of God. As the class progressed, it was evident that many experienced a spiritual transformation, thus validating the hypothesis.

Lastly, one of the unexpected outcomes of the class was the sense of fellowship and community that the participants experienced. There were five participants at each table. I originally did not plan for any table discussion because of the nature of the material that was being presented. I did not want anyone to feel uncomfortable or obligated to share what they were experiencing. What I discovered, however, was that

many people started conversations on their own. I could see healthy connections being made and new friendships being formed. Therefore, each week, I added a few more questions for table discussion. Several of the participants even shared with the larger group. Many participants shared testimonies of how the power of God was working in their lives, and the new things they were learning about God in the class. As the leader, I helped facilitate these conversations and discussions.

All the participants were from Lindenwald Community Church and volunteered to be a participant in the class. I have been serving this church for a little over two years. I was assigned mid-season (in December 2021) to oversee this church, and that was challenging for me. It has been a joy to get to know this congregation on a more personal level through this class.

Shortly after I started working at the church, the church's custodian handed me a large ring of antique-looking keys. Neither of us had any idea of what they opened. It was in that moment that a prophetic thought came to me—the old keys would unlock new doors. Based on this revelation, each person received one of these keys at the start of my class as a token of what this class would represent for them: a key to unlock their relationship with God. Each participant held a key that led to new understanding and personal awakening.

This class turned out to be a learning experience for me as well. I gained a better understanding of how believers may experience God. I also grew in knowledge of Scripture, and the Holy Spirit gave me opportunities to grow in my leadership and pastoral skills.

The data collection methods of the pre- and post-questionnaires were very helpful. Many participants had grown up in a church, but they grew in their experiential knowledge of God because of the class. The journal entries revealed which teachings and practicum/methods made the greatest and least impact. The personal interviews provided a means to obtain feedback, and this feedback allowed me to gain awareness of the emotions that were felt because of the impact of the class. It was powerful to witness how my focus group shared openly and embraced vulnerability in sharing their experience of the class. One of the goals I had for this class was to help further the progress my participants made by leading and guiding my congregants into more experiences with God after this project ended. I created a short survey to be taken in the last class to see what topics my participants wanted to learn more about at the conclusion of the project. The top two topics were hearing God's voice and the role and activity of the Holy Spirit. A close second was the topic of spiritual gifts as described in the Bible.

Implementation

I created a six-week curriculum in which participants engaged in discipleship practices from a variety of teachings in which they could come to know God more. I taught from my foundation papers for the first half of the class and offered a hands-on practicum during each class which consisted of different discipleship activities aimed at helping the believer grow. My original plans for this project were altered after I was reappointed to a different church in semester three of the doctoral program, which meant I would not implement my project in the church I had intended. I was disappointed at first because I knew many people who would have participated in the class resulting from the

relational equity I had with them. After the first two years in my new appointment, I realized I was meant to implement my project at Lindenwald Community Church.

My class was held during Lent and concluded on Palm Sunday. I created a sermon series entitled “Awakening” and developed a Lenten devotional as a companion to this sermon series. Some of the themes within the project were reinforced in this series on Sunday mornings and through the devotional. For the sake of data analysis, I focused my research only on the prescribed class coursework.

Participants

Participants for the class were individuals from my church. I promoted the class through a weekly bulletin, newsletter, and by personal invitation. Twenty-three individuals signed up for the class. Three people decided not to participate due to scheduling and the requirement of journaling after each class. I was pleased to have twenty participants. It was beneficial to both my research and table discussion.

Challenges

I had major knee surgery on December 18, 2023. I was immobile and unable to bear weight on my leg for six weeks. I was in a full leg brace for two months followed by several months of physical therapy. This was a major inconvenience to my life, and it impacted the preparation and implementation of the project. I had physical limitations and was not able to walk normally or without pain; therefore, I was not able to work through the lesson plans far enough in advance to get to them to my professional associates in a timely manner to get their feedback and insight.

My schedule also became a little hectic at the end of our course. The class concluded on Palm Sunday, so I went directly into Holy Week and then officiated two funerals. It took me longer than anticipated to comb through the data of twenty journals. I was able to meet with five participants who formed as a focus group and interviewed three people. I found most of the people were not interested in doing interviews.

Though it was a good experience overall, I would do some things differently in a future project of this type. I would have paired the teaching of John Wesley's Fetter Lane experience to the prayer time with David and Madeline Henners as an invitation and opportunity for impartation. I would also have changed how I taught from the biblical foundation paper during the first class. I felt the content of the teaching was too academic, and it would have been more impactful to include practical application to the participants in some way. For example, I would have made it more participatory by including discussion at the tables to break up the teaching.

The Class

The project was held at Lindenwald Community Church in Hamilton, Ohio from February 18–March 24, 2024. We gathered on Sunday afternoons at 2:00 p.m. Participants completed the consent forms and pre-questionnaires prior to the start of the class. The room was set up each week with four tables with room for five people at a table. As participants entered the classroom space, they were greeted by a table with candles and large keys as a visual. They each received a journal and a pen. Every table had a lit candle in the center, a hymnal book, and candy.

Each week I opened in prayer before we sang two hymns that complimented the topic for that day. I shared a recap of what we learned and experienced the week before, asked if there were any questions before starting, and then began teaching on the new lesson. We took a break after forty-five minutes to which snacks and drinks were made available. After the practicum was introduced, everyone engaged in the discipleship activity that was presented, either with their table or through large group discussion.

The first week I introduced two discipleship diagrams, and I taught Ephesians 1:17–19. I taught that this letter from Paul had a twofold agenda: new identity and life in Christ. The new identity concept connects head knowledge with the heart. When the head and the heart are joined together, the eyes of the heart are illuminated, and new wisdom and revelation transpire to know God more. I encouraged the participants to ask God to reveal himself to them.

Paul believed that if a person experiences the power of God, the person will have a transformational encounter that will result in intimate knowledge of God. One of the ways a person's faith grows is through a heart-changing spiritual experience. The prophet Isaiah writes, "The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him, the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord" (Isa. 11:2). The purpose of divine illumination is to result in an increase of knowledge of God. It is to know God and to experience him as Father and God, to walk in obedience, in worship, and have a heightened spiritual awareness. This moves a person from a casual or impersonal relationship to one that is personal and intimate. I shared that God is present and speaks to us through Scripture, but we must exercise our faith, and these experiences are what grow our faith.

Next, I introduced a practicum activity from Mike Breen' book, *Building A Discipling Culture*.[2] In his book, he introduces a diagram called the Learning Square. During one of our classes, I drew this diagram on a whiteboard and shared John 2:1–11 as an example of the stages of learning (figure 1). At the wedding in Cana, the disciples' eyes were opened to who Jesus was; it was a D2 moment (new awareness). Each group engaged in answering the following questions: (1) Do you think Jesus' disciples progressed in their learning comparative to the Learning Square?; (2) Does that encourage you, and if so, how?; (3) How have your eyes been opened, like the disciples', to a new understanding of who God is?; (4) In what ways or areas do you want to grow in your faith?; (5) What is God speaking to you?; (6) What are you going to do about it?

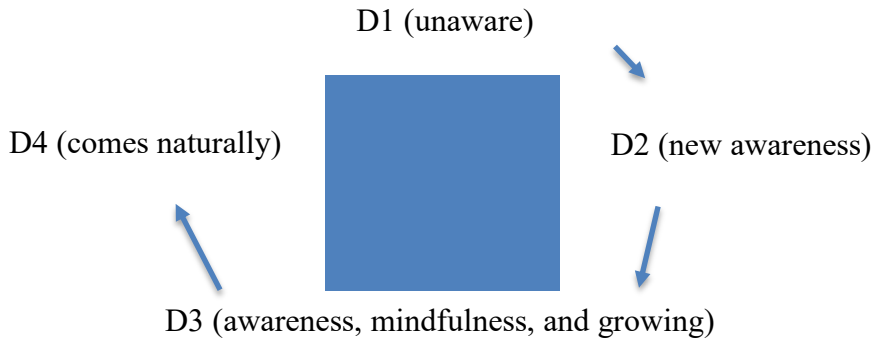

Figure 1. Learning Square

The above illustration and questioning helped the participants gain a greater understanding of how one learns new concepts, including those related to Scripture. It encouraged participants to consider how to assimilate what one may sense God saying to them. The original disciples progressively learned about Jesus just as believers do today.

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[2] Mike Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 3rd ed. (Greenville, SC: 3DM Publishing, 2016), 130, 142.

The participants engaged in thoughtful and transformative conversation because of this illustration.

I introduced a second diagram the following week. I drew a semicircle titled "Abiding in God" on a whiteboard to illustrate the need to rest and abide in Jesus to fuel our work (figure 2). The semicircle shows the extremes of a pendulum and how rest and work are to be balanced in the disciple's life. I shared John 15:1–8 as an example to support this. Our aim is to find a balance between rest and work, and to learn how to settle into a spiritual rhythm. I challenged my participants to aim to get at least 1% better at this. Each participant engaged in the following questions: (1) To which side does the pendulum lean to in your life?; (2) How do you feel when you are "all work" and "no rest"?; (3) How does spending time (abiding) with God affect your work?; (4) What would you like to change about your current rhythm?; (5) What is God telling you?; (6) What are you going to do about it?

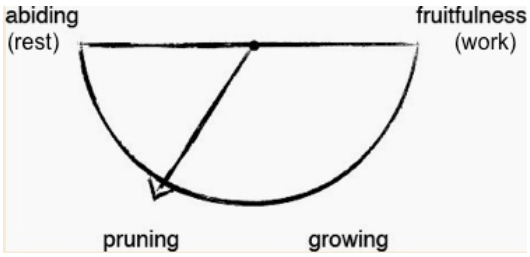

Figure 2. Abiding in God

This second diagram seemed eye opening to my participants. They received the revelation of how important it is to take time to rest and abide in the Lord. The Scripture verse I used also emphasized being connected to the Vine which allows God the opportunity to prune what is unproductive. Many participants engaged in fruitful table discussion.

During this second week, I also introduced a teaching on neuroplasticity. I shared about how researchers believe that mindfulness and spiritual faith have a notable impact on the mind. The study of neuroplasticity reveals that the mind can influence the brain. As a result, it is possible to create new neuro pathways of thinking which open the mind to the power and presence of God. The apostle Paul wrote about this power of renewing the mind, which is in alignment with modern scientific research.

Believers are told, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind" (Rom. 12:2). Not only do we have the responsibility of actively renewing our thoughts and creating new pathways of thinking, but God's Spirit also opens one's mind to new ways of thinking, and this fosters more of a desire to have a relationship with God and not just know about him. Through new pathways, a person can experience transformational personal encounters with God. It is important to note that while God has the power to transform hearts and minds, a person must be open and willing to change their thinking and open themselves to the power of God. Scientific research supports this notion that the brain can change through the power of the mind, allowing for transformational change of one's entire being.

The Bible is God's Word and has the power to transform lives. When believers intentionally choose to attend to God's Word, they can know God more. Both the body and mind have the capacity to change by hearing God through the Bible and having the ability to recall Scripture with their mind. Believers are connected as the body of Christ, and they affect one another because of a common and divine sense of purpose.

I shared a powerful story with my participants to drive home this point. The story was from a podcast of an interview with Dr. Jackson, a medical doctor, and a man

of faith. In this interview, Dr. Jackson shared his personal testimony and the testimonies of a few others. He regularly engaged in the practice of praying for his patients at home prior to surgery. One day, he heard the Lord say to him, "If you don't acknowledge me before men, I won't acknowledge you before the Father." As a result of the impression he felt from the Lord, he changed his prayer routine to offering prayer to his patients prior to surgery. He said that 99% of his patients welcomed his in-person pre-surgical prayers.

Dr. Jackson noted a connection between the recovery time and the attitude and outlook his patients carried into surgery. He argued that one's attitude is critical. If a person says, "This surgery is going to help me," they have less pain and better results post-surgery. Dr. Jackson is a proponent of how mind training aids in health recovery. Dr. Jackson professes to be led by the Lord in using the mind of Christ and the wisdom of God to effect the best possible outcome of his surgeries. This coursework had a deep impact on my participants, as many were unaware of the science of neuroplasticity. Likewise, after sharing of Dr. Jackson's experiences, many of my participants were able to see how the mind influences the brain, and the impact faith in Christ can have on the brain.

In an effort to bridge neuroplasticity with the supernatural work of God, I shared the following Scriptural promises: God's promise to send the Holy Spirit, who will lead believers into all truth (John 14:16–18); God's promise to give believers a Spirit of wisdom and revelation so they may know him better (Eph. 1:17–19); and God's promise that He will continue speaking to us personally and by means of the Body through the spiritual gifts of knowledge, prophecy, and tongues, until Jesus returns (1 Cor. 13:8).

During this week's practicum time, I engaged participants in a spiritual exercise. I used Mark Virkler's list of *4 Keys to Hearing God's Voice.*[3] The keys are founded upon Habakkuk 2:1–2. I have outlined them below.

1. "I will stand at my guard post": participants were encouraged to quiet themselves for some moments while I offered centering words to help them clear their minds and embrace stillness.
2. "I will watch and see": I encouraged my participants to fix their eyes on Jesus. I shared how I often envision myself with Jesus in some passage of Scripture. God can communicate through words, phrases, or images. I prayed for God to reveal himself to us.
3. "What will he speak to me?": I asked the group to tune into a spontaneous flow of imagination and thoughts. I challenged them to consider what came into their minds.
4. "For the Lord said, 'record the vision'": This is about writing or recording what God is speaking. I exhorted my participants to consider journaling as a process of writing things down as they listened for God's voice.

I spoke to my participants about how to process and discern spontaneous flowing thoughts that come to us, and the importance of sharing these with others to test if they are from God's Spirit or their own thoughts. This practicum helped some participants make a connection between the teaching on neuroplasticity and how faith and God impact the brain. Interestingly, our conversation turned into a discussion on speaking in

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[3] Mark Virkler, *4 Keys to Hearing God's Voice* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, 2010), 213.

tongues because of the Corinthian Scripture I shared. We did not talk in-depth about the four keys exercise itself.

In the third week, I continued to teach on neuroplasticity because of its relevance to my project and what it means to know God. I shared how the brain is continually rewiring itself by imprints repeatedly made on it through a person's experiences, emotions, self-talk, and attitudes. Neural pathways are created by repetition and the repeated messages given to the brain either form a new neural pathway or reinforce an already existing pathway. I gave an illustration of comparing the brain to building roads.

In time, within the brain, with enough repetition, pathways become roads and roads become highways. Through a lot of repetition, highways become superhighways. These roads are neural networks that hold a person's beliefs, attitudes, and opinions. The brain is continually being formed and re-formed. As the brain forms new pathways, it transforms the mind with repeated messages. The brain also prunes neural pathways that are no longer being used. Science supports the popular phrase, "Use it or lose it."

Researchers believe that regularly engaging in Scripture meditation and reflection can change a person's inner reality or core beliefs because the brain will take what is meditated upon as real, even if it differs from what is perceived in the world. The brain can change its structure in response to a person's experience. When a person lives by what they meditate upon and not what is seen in the world, it becomes a core belief.

I shared further how Scripture meditation has the power and ability to bring about a transformational change of core beliefs in one's heart. Neuroscientists believe that what a person chooses to think about and meditate upon will direct who they become in the future. It can also sculpt the ever-changing mind. This research gives a whole new

meaning to "changing one's mind" when a decision needs to be made. When a person makes a commitment to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, something occurs in the mind to declare and affirm that decision. It is a literal change of one's mind from one way of thinking to another. It is a decision made with both the head and the heart.

For the practicum portion of this third week, I taught my participants the *Lectio Divina* method of reading Scripture. I printed two different Scripture passages on a piece of paper: Ephesians 1:15–23 and 3:14–21. I explained that *Lectio Divina* is Latin for "Divine Reading." One person was instructed to read a verse aloud at each table. At the conclusion of the reading, they were to underline what stood out to them and share the response with the participants at their table. Then, I had a different person at each table read the same passage again except I asked them to circle what they felt God was saying to them and share this with the other participants at their tables. This method was new to the class. Many were touched spiritually and felt God speaking to them through this method of ingesting Scripture.

In week four, I taught about pneumatology. I shared examples of revivals such as Azusa Street and the recent outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Asbury University. Most of the class had not heard the term "pneumatology;" many participants knew very little about the Holy Spirit. I shared that pneumatology is the study of the biblical doctrine of the Holy Spirit, including the nature of the Spirit, the deity of the Spirit, and the work of the Spirit throughout Scripture. The Holy Spirit is active and present in the life of a believer. We talked about how many believers sense the presence of the Holy Spirit through his leadership, guidance, and comfort.

I explained to my participants that the manifest presence of the Holy Spirit may be experienced individually and among a community of believers. The Holy Spirit works in the life of a believer for renewal, transformation, and to strengthen a believer for the work of ministry. It is Father God's desire that his sons and daughters obtain a personal relationship with him through the power of his Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, who brought the church into existence, is still guiding and sustaining it and its people.

For the practicum, we engaged in two different practices. I led a prayer for the participants to experience the Holy Spirit in some tangible manner, and we waited on the Lord silently for a minute. Then I had them put their hands on their face in a way that cradled their face as if it were somebody else's hands. After a few seconds of silence, I said: "Father, I ask you to come and stand right in front of each of these brothers and sisters and tell them what you call them." I asked them to quickly write down their first impression of what they felt God spoke to them. Several of the participants were surprised and overjoyed with what they heard. I asked David and Rev. Dr. Madeline Henners to be available for a time of ministry and prayer to help us further our experience of the presence of the Holy Spirit. This was a new experience for many of the participants. Some experienced receiving prophetic words, healing, deliverance, or a touch from the Holy Spirit in some other form.

In week five, I taught on John Wesley's Fetter Lane experience. Many participants were familiar with Wesley's Aldersgate encounter, not his Fetter Lane experience. I shared that while at a meeting with the Moravians on Aldersgate Street in London, John heard a reading of Martin Luther's preface to Paul's letter to the Romans. The preface included an explanation of faith and the doctrine of justification, and it

described the change in which God works in the heart through faith in Christ. This was a turning point for Wesley and his personal relationship with God; a spiritual shift began to happen as he felt his heart strangely warmed.

Wesley, along with others, desired a closer fellowship with God. Due to their yearning, a new band, or small group was formed called the Fetter Lane Society. This group played a pivotal role in John Wesley's faith journey, and his sense of assurance of salvation. It was there that Wesley had his life-changing encounter with the Lord.

The Fetter Lane Society experience would be that missing spiritual piece for John Wesley. Peter Böhler and other Moravians opened the Fetter Lane Society in England. It was during this time that Wesley and Böhler started a friendship. Both John Wesley and Peter Böhler were involved in the creation of this new society at Fetter Lane. It was not a Moravian society, but rather a religious group in connection with the Church of England. The rules for weekly meetings included prayer, confession, discussion in smaller groups, procedures for new members, and provision for a once-a-month love-feast from 7:00–10:00 p.m. The focus of the society was salvation and the spiritual health of its members.

While at a love-feast at a Fetter Lane Society meeting on New Year's Day, 1739, John Wesley (and approximately sixty others) had a life-changing encounter with God. Wesley recorded, "the power of God came mightily upon us, insomuch that many cried out for exceeding joy, and many fell to the ground." There was excitement in London over the move of the Holy Spirit at the Fetter Lane Society gathering; revival was beginning. Wesley witnessed and experienced a powerful move of the Holy Spirit at Fetter Lane. One could deduce that Wesley was changed due to the power of the Holy

Spirit. A hundred years later, after the General Conference of the Methodist Church in England, Fetter Lane was deemed the start of Methodism.

For this fifth week's practicum, I introduced a new discipleship diagram: the Relationship Triangle (figure 3). This triangle represents how we grow into deeper relationships with God and others. The different points of the triangle reveal the balance between our life with God, with other believers, and others outside the church. The purpose of this exercise was to encourage achieving balance in these relational areas. I also read aloud Matthew 17:1–21 (the mount of transfiguration with Jesus and the disciples), and I invited each table to engage in conversation with these questions: (1) Describe what the "UP" moment must have been like for those who were there with Jesus; (2) Look at the components of the triangle and rate your 'up,' 'in,' and 'out' action on a scale of one to ten; (3) Is there an area you would like to gain more balance or increase?; (4) What is your plan to find more balance in your worship of God, relationships with other believers, and mission outside the church?; (5) What are sensing God is telling you?

Growing in our love and encounter with God
as Father, Son and Holy Spirit
UP
IN
Deepening our love for other disciples
with whom we're journeying
OUT
Actively sharing the love of God
with others through words and actions

Figure 3. Relationship Triangle

John Wesley was dedicated to his spiritual practices. During our practicum time, I reiterated how to understand this triangle of relationships using Wesley. We reflected on how he spent time with God, time with others in the religious societies, and in ministry related activities like preaching to others. These examples resonated with many of my participants, and they also revealed areas of needed realignment in my participants' spiritual lives.

In the final class, week six, I shared a handout with some of the resources I used for the class, along with discipleship tools for continued spiritual growth. I also created a survey for them to take to see what topics they would like to learn more about in their journey with the Lord. For this teaching portion, I shared a recap of each of the previous teachings and practicums instead of only sharing a summary of the week before. I allowed time for questions and comments after each week's recap.

Lastly, I introduced a final practicum, *Visio Divina*. This is Latin for "divine seeing." *Visio Divina* is a prayer practice like *Lectio Divina*, only the object for meditation is not God's Word but an image or a picture. The goal is to encounter God's presence in what we see rather than what we read. In Scripture, God often engaged with his people by giving them visions. I provided eighteen different objects for this activity, which were displayed on two tables. Some were religious and some were not. I led the participants in the exercise and gave them instructions to leave their tables and walk around the two tables filled with various objects. I asked them to respond to the following questions or prompts: (1) What emotions does this image(s) evoke in you?; (2) What else does the image stir up in you?; (3) Notice if there is a place on the object where your eye

is invited to linger. Is there a certain detail or color? After ten minutes, I asked them to return to their tables and share their experience among themselves.

I invited them to return for a second time. This time I prayed before I released them to the tables. I asked them to close their eyes, lean back in their seats, and take some deep breaths. I prayed for an awareness from their head to settle into their heart, and for God to give them eyes to see. I asked them to be present and open, and for God to reveal himself to them through the object. At the conclusion of the prayer, I released them to the tables again. This time I asked them to look at the object again with an open mind and listen for what they felt God was saying to them. After ten minutes, I invited them to return to their tables and share their experience. This seemed to be the most impactful of all the practicums. I discovered that many of my participants were visual learners. As a result, some of them were touched by God to the point of being moved to tears, and many felt a deep sense of Father God's love. We ended the class by singing the hymn "Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place." I then offered a time for prayer and anointing with oil.

Summary of Learning

Class Development

The first area of learning consisted of strategically planning each class in detail. This meant coordinating the hymns, teaching lessons, and practicums to all sync together for each week's lesson. It was essential that the flow of each class built on the previous one in the development of the curricula. Three main different data collection methods

(with one added) were implemented: pre- and post-questionnaires, journals, interviews, and a focus group. Participants were invited to respond to the prompts in their journals at the conclusion of each class. I used the same four journal questions for each of the six-week classes: (1) What stood out to you the most and why?; (2) What elements impacted you spiritually?; (3) Did you experience God in new ways?; and (4) Did any of the teaching or methods help you grow in experiential knowledge of God? Twenty-three people signed up for the class, but only twenty participated. Two had scheduling conflicts and one person chose to leave the class because she did not like journaling. I realized I should have more clearly communicated this requirement at the onset of promoting the class.

Regarding interviews, four people signed up for an interview; one cancelled due to a conflict. Interview questions included: (1) Were you spiritually impacted by the class?; (2) Did you grow in experiential knowledge of God because of this class?; (3) Was there a particular teaching or experience that was meaningful for you?; and (4) Did the tools provided help you better understand Scripture? Five people participated in a focus group. Focus group questions included: (1) To you, what is the difference between head knowledge and heart knowledge?; (2) Based on the difference between head and heart knowledge, did you experience any change in either as a result?; (3) Does the science of neuroplasticity impact your beliefs on how God can help a person experience spiritual transformation?; (4) In remembering the prayer model, was it helpful in giving insight into how God answers prayers?; and (5) Were any discipleship methods helpful to you? Through analyzing the various data collection methods, I was able to note which participants experienced an awakening to know God more and a new understanding of

God. It was also evident that all participants enjoyed being in a group setting. Two important things I noted at the end were the continued need for small groups and offering additional discipleship opportunities.

Data Collection and Analysis

The effectiveness of this project was evaluated based on measuring my participants' growth in their experiential knowledge (personal encounters) of God as they went through the *Keys to Unlock Your Relationship with God* class. This mixed methods research project is mostly qualitative, measuring affective change through phenomenological design. Measuring the growth of experiential knowledge was assessed by written responses to prompts in the questionnaires and through journal entries, interviews, and focus groups. The data analysis from the class revealed whether there existed a change in experiential knowledge before and after the class. The journal prompts were the same for each week which highlighted what teachings and practicums were the most effective and impactful. The prompts revealed how the participants were impacted spiritually, if they experienced God in a new way, and if they grew in their experiential knowledge of God.

Journal Analysis of Each Class

During the first week, I taught about Ephesians 1:17–19 and shared two diagrams: the Learning Square (figure 1) and the Abiding in God semi-circle (figure 2). The focus of this teaching centered on illustrating the heart of Father God. I emphasized knowing

him more, and I worked to make a connection between head and heart knowledge. We discussed the importance of abiding with God.

Based on journal entries of my participants, the teachings that resonated most with them were the ones about connection with the head and heart and gaining a new awareness (or learning to be aware) of God's presence. The value of being in fellowship and connected as a community of believers was evident in the first class, and it continued as a foundational theme throughout the data analysis. The elements that had a spiritual impact were the teaching moments using the diagrams. This seemed to bring conviction to some of the participants regarding their alignment of choices and beliefs. They understood there was an imbalance in their "abiding with the Lord." Some comments that indicate participants gained a new awareness are: "the newness would be experiencing God through new people," "the semi-circle made me realize I need to spend more time with God," and an "awareness of how much God loves me and what I can learn from Scripture." The discipleship diagrams helped many of the visual learners to comprehend new concepts.

For the second week, I taught about neuroplasticity. New pathways of understanding can be created in the brain, and this reveals how God can transform our brains and thinking. I shared an exercise from Virkler's book on *4 Keys to Hear God's Voice.* Some of my participants' journal entries indicated that God's Spirit was at work during this teaching. This is evident in how some testified to breakthrough and a new awareness to God's voice and to Scripture. Responses from participants are listed below, and I noted an observation in parenthesis concluding some of their responses related to figure 1:

> The presence of God was surely in the room, his sheep listened and learned to hear his voice. Learning the 4 keys to hearing God's voice reinforced that prayer is a dialogue and not a monologue.
>
> Through neuroplasticity, he made us to have a relationship with him. Keep "tuned in" to him will show us he is with us. I know he's always there, but I don't always see Ephesians 1:17, so that you may know him more.
>
> I learned new methods to hear God's voice more often. The testimonies of others helped to understand the keys. I felt God wanted me here, that I needed the methods and techniques.
>
> I need the practices to make a positive spiritual impact and rewire my brain.
>
> People opened up more. This was the first time I spoke of my feelings. (breakthrough)
>
> I need to listen more and write down what I am feeling and hearing. (new awareness)
>
> The 4 keys gave me guidance and direction that I had been missing. I am not very good at praying and now I see that the Lord speaks to me but I didn't always catch it. (awakening)
>
> I learned that I can talk to God and feel his presence (new awareness).
>
> During this class, there was a lot of personal sharing at the tables and in the larger group.
>
> Absolutely, the Lord is guiding my mission.
>
> I forget to stop and open myself to him. (new awareness)
>
> Singing 'God is in the place,' I felt his presence. (awakening)
>
> I experienced God in a new way through testimonies and listening to others.
>
> Looking for vision and listening for instructions from God instead of just my laundry list of wants and needs.

Participants were vulnerable in sharing their experiences and feelings and, as a result, the participants bonded with each other through these shared experiences. We developed a strong sense of community. Singing together as an act of worship and

surrender had a powerful effect on how the rest of that day went. The phenomenological nature of the class sparked a new spiritual awareness among my participants, and some participants testified to growing in their experiential knowledge of God.

In week three, I again taught about neuroplasticity, and I introduced the *Lectio Divina* method of reading Scripture. This was another week where I witnessed the presence of God moving in our class. Many of the journal entries revealed the effectiveness of this transformative discipleship method. *Lectio Divina* opened a new way for many of the participants to experience God through Scripture. Some of my participants testified to this with responses such as:

> Lectio Divina opens a new way to experience God that I need to practice rewiring my brain. Adding divine reading helps to me to concentrate on what God is saying to me now was a change, subtle but different.
>
> Asking for God's Spirit before we read the Scripture passage was meaningful to me. It appears to me to be a required part of divine reading. You must put your mind in the right mode and be open to the Holy Spirit for it to work. I felt the Holy Spirit speaking to me in what I circled in the exercise.
>
> Lectio Divina was a good method, I need to practice it regularly, to change my habit and rewire my brain. These sessions call for change, practice, and repetition.
>
> Lectio Divina- new way for me to see how the Holy Spirit is talking to me personally. I usually mark areas in my Bible to help explain what is being said and not how it affects me.
>
> Asking God to help me spot the negative thoughts and redirect them to better paths.
>
> Every week it seems that I'm finding ways to connect with God. I find myself looking for God in everything and everybody.
>
> Hearing testimonies of participants.
>
> Reading Scripture and thinking about what God is saying to me, looking for the deeper meaning of what is being said. Divine reading is a new process for

> me. I spend most of my Scripture reading just trying to understand the words. I don't always process the feelings that go with Scripture.
>
> Slowing down in reading the Word and finding what it is telling me.
>
> The divine reading. To read and look at a Scripture in a new light.

These journal entries reflect a new awareness of how God speaks through Scripture. In these entries, there is also evidence of head and heart changes. Many were able to connect the teaching of neuroplasticity with God's ability to transform the mind. Sharing testimonies was encouraging and insightful. Also, the importance of acting as a community and body was noteworthy among their responses.

In week four, I taught about pneumatology once again, and David and Rev. Dr. Madeline Henners were present to pray with people and minister to them if participants desired this. Nineteen of the twenty participants were present on this day. Afterward, I taught on the Holy Spirit and led the class in prayer. I had each person cup their hands on their face as I prayed, "Father, I ask you to come and stand right in front of each of my brothers and sisters and tell them what you call them." After having them write down their first impressions, I noted how some of my participants were touched by God. These are the impressions the participants heard:

> "Mon Cheri"—which means "my love."
> This exercise with the hand to the face, got an image of my first communion picture in my blue suit, bow tie, hands clasped in prayer. Is God asking me to go back to that time in faith?
>
> I felt the spirit said to me, "Hey! I am here. Trust me like a person. Open yourself to me."
>
> Putting my hands on my face while praying was a different feeling. I made praying feel like God was reaching down and touched me.
>
> When we sat quietly with our hands on face and pastor Julie prayed, I felt the presence of the Holy Spirit as though I was being embraced. (awakening)

> During the silent time the word “friend” popped into my head. (awakening)
>
> During the prayer time holding my face, I saw Jesus kneeling beside me calling me his beloved child. (awakening)
>
> When praying with my hand on face I perceived God call me “friend.” This visual part was unclear, like a vapor between him and me. I assume this represents the barriers that I still have.
>
> The time in which we had our hands on our face we asked for a word from God, I felt the word “beloved.” Then Julie said the same word a few times after that.
>
> I rarely feel beloved. I don’t feel worthy. To start feeling that I am worthy of God’s love is a new experience. (awakening)
>
> When I put my hands on my face, I heard the word “beloved.”
>
> Today the HS reminded me he calls me “chosen.”
>
> “My daughter, be with me” are the words I heard when God spoke to me when I put my hands to my face.
>
> Listen to God, be quiet, allow the peace and understanding to flow.
>
> I am going to try and remember the warmth and love I felt during the prayer time. To allow God to rule and not my insecurities to take over.

For this day’s teaching, nineteen participants were present and eleven received a word or image following the prayer. It was a meaningful experience. Many were surprised that they heard or sensed a word or image. One could feel the presence of God in the room, and the participants gained a new awareness in knowing God more personally. I introduced a ministry time after the break. David and Madeline shared their backgrounds and personal experiences of God, and then offered for people to come forward for prayer. Below are the journal entries following the ministry time, and other entries of experiencing the Holy Spirit during this week’s class.

> When David said he was a Seer, he told me he saw goodness in me. I thought of being able to see signs is one of my gifts. Open the eyes of my heart, Lord. I just never thought of it that way. God is so good.

> Absolutely, my head and my shoulders are on fire where our guests placed their hands on me. Their prayers have accelerated my desire to give women hope where there is none. Lord, lead me! Form the words and thoughts and songs onto my heart, soul, and mind.
>
> Having Madeline and David here was a blessing. Thinking about the HS and his care for me was impactful.
>
> I really felt the HS working as they prayed healing for me.
>
> Our table discussion about the Holy Spirit confirmed for me that He is moving in me and expecting me to share His Spirit.
>
> I have ignored that the HS exists. Today I realize I must include it in my prayer when reading the Bible in all areas of my life. (new awareness)
>
> Praying and asking for a word can be a feeling or image rather than just a word shooting across my mind. (new awareness)
>
> Again, knowing that the Spirit is within me. That means that God is also within me, and I am his child. (new understanding)
>
> Allowing time to quietly sit and breathe in the Holy Spirit. I plan to allow more time during my devotional time to wait on the Lord.
>
> It was/is wonderful to be in a group this size and freely speak of the Holy Spirit. It feels like we are more together, more of one accord. The forward movement is slow, but the movement is forward.
>
> Hearing the Holy Spirit reaches every person. The warmth and comfort that I feel is overwhelming.

The participants were emotionally moved by the presence of God and grew in experiential knowledge of the Holy Spirit in this session. One of the consistent themes I read in the journal entries for this teaching was a lack of understanding the Holy Spirit. Though they lacked understanding, they were receptive. Most of the group were not familiar with pneumatology and expressed a desire to learn more. I have been at this church for a little over two years, and I see now that teaching on the Holy Spirit is a good teaching opportunity for me in the future. I also noted that several participants felt God

call them “beloved.” Perhaps the area of worth is a good topic to teach on in the future also.

In week five, I taught about John Wesley’s Aldersgate and Fetter Lane experiences. I introduced a triangle discipleship diagram called the Relationship Triangle (figure 3) as a method by which participants could analyze where they exist in their relationships with God, with other believers, and those outside the church. Wesley modeled this method. I asked the participants to measure their relationship status in each area, with the challenge of getting 1% better. One of the surprises that came out of the group discussion was an emphasis on the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues. This was not a part of the curriculum, but someone asked about it. This can be a difficult topic, especially in Methodism, but my participants demonstrated curiosity and openness to understanding more about it. Unfortunately, nine of the twenty participants were absent on this day due to participants having season tickets to a symphony concert. This affected the large group discussion and data collection. The journal entries reflected participants gained new understanding, new experiences, and an openness to God and his Spirit.

> The Love Feast to help me grow spiritually is on my radar. The triangle is a great visual to help me balance it all.
>
> Conversation led me to remember a former church member who spoke in tongues. I experienced God in a new way through the phrases: “in the wrestling that we are refined” and “What we are doing with God not just for him.” Fire starters-there is a fire burning in my soul. Spiritual health. Hearing of John Wesley’s experience helps me to consider where we’ve been and where we’re going in our church families.
>
> I don’t have to be perfect. I need to strive for perfection. But I never have to obtain it. I can grow in my relationship with God in small ways. It doesn’t have to be a complete and radical transformation all at once, but small changes along the way.

> The Wesley brothers experiencing the Holy Spirit during Love feast. We can become fire starters! There is a difference between joy and abiding joy. The presence of charismatic roots. Not what we are doing for God but what we are doing with God.
>
> The importance of speaking in tongues as a gift given by God to an individual for the benefit of enhancing relationship with God.
>
> The need for small groups. That we continue to grow in small groups.
>
> Serving with God not just for God.
>
> I gained an understanding of how Christ has led me to this point. I appreciate the drawings/shapes and explanation of each step.

It was clear that in the conversations we had, and in journal entries, that many participants were impacted by John Wesley's spiritual journey which included his testimony of wrestling with his faith. Everyone had heard of his Aldersgate experience, but none of my participants knew of the Fetter Lane experience. Sharing Methodist history normalized the gifts of the Spirit and the power of the Holy Spirit for us. The participants embraced this newfound knowledge of their Methodist heritage. One could sense the "fire starters" being awakened.

The last session, week six, consisted of a recap of each of the previous weeks' teachings and practicums. The participants enjoyed the summary and the ability to ask questions as we finished the class. In this last class, I also introduced a final practicum, *Visio Divina*. The response of my participants to this activity was amazing and more than I anticipated. Many people were deeply moved by this discipleship method because of how they felt the presence of God in the images/objects. As a result, many testified to feeling like they came to know God more. The journal entries reflect this new understanding, awakening, and encounter with the love of God.

The Visio Divina method evokes so much emotion. I was amazed at how others at my table reacted today. Thank you, Jesus, for reaching out and touching us. There is indeed an awakening in our souls at Lindenwald Community Church.

Visio Divina: The Lords Supper icon. Jesus and his disciples share a meal before his death. God is telling me to focus on him as the center of my life and to use my colors to develop my spiritual life to share with others.

The figurine of people in a circle, symbol of the path God led me on to teach small children. The people were all connected to each other which also represented my connections and interactions with others are so important to me. God has surrounded me with family and friends who are good for me and good to me.

I began to feel God's presence here and the Holy Spirt was moving through the people in my group. I experienced God in the Visio Divina. The image in my mind was almost a transfiguration of everybody in that place. The image was the Last Supper. Another image was the fish in the basket. Both were food, bodily need for food and spiritual food. Felt God was saying the spiritual world is real, the kingdom of God is real. The hymn "Because He Lives" was impactful and hit me today.

Wow! Visio Divina. I had no expectations that anything would happen. I feel like I was literally hit over the head. So emotional. I have never experienced this before. Image: Jesus walking with a child, the moment lasted a while and brought tears to my eyes. He's always going to be there with me. I am never alone; he will always walk with me. This class was the most insightful of all the classes.

The message of the object. (Red lantern) that he's waiting for me. Emotions: that someone is waiting for us and keeping the light on. As long as there is life there is hope. Symbol of perseverance and determination. God is waiting, that I don't have to do it on my own. Yes, I've never looked at an object and asked God the message he had for me. It felt personal.

Statue of Jesus and the child, I am a child of God~I AM WORTHY.

I guess because I am more visual learner, I was most affected by the shape exercise. I can apply these methods to my every day walk with Jesus and see the progress I am making. (new awareness)

Object: Jesus holding the child's hand. Jesus is saying "don't let go" to me as I look at the figurine. I want to be more intentional with my daily devotions. I liked the process of looking at an object that draws you to Jesus and the feelings I was aware of. (awakening)

> The Eagle stood out; bird flight has always fascinated me. Jesus with the child, we are like little children learning and trusting in him. I need to allow him to lead me more, with my trusting him.
>
> I chose Jesus with the lamb on his shoulders. I felt love, comfort, and gratitude. What drew me to the image: when I stray, he pulls me back. Visio Divina spoke to my soul. I saw that Jesus stood tall and erect, not weighed down. I tend to worry and then I heard the Spirit say to give my burdens to Jesus-nothing is too heavy for him. He does indeed carry me. (new awareness)
>
> In the group share I could experience God through others. In the quiet time while writing in the journal, I listened to the soft music and felt the presence of the Lord. (awakening, sensing God)
>
> The emotions that I felt and the emotions I saw in others as they talked about what they felt from the objects. Image: Eagle; joy-the song God will lift you up on eagles' wings. Soaring eagle, free going where the winds of God move it. God is saying focus and firmness is sometimes required. (awakening)
>
> Looking at things like this reminds me to stop and look at what is around you.
>
> Jesus and the child statue is the one which I was drawn to the most because they reach for each other.

By week six, many of the participants had developed bonds with each other. This shared experience of spending time together was moving for many of them. This discipleship activity was not only effective for the individual participants, but the emotional and spiritual awareness that transpired among the group was powerful as well. They experienced the love of the Father in transformative ways that resulted in knowing him more.

In summary, the journal entries reveal a pattern of spiritual growth and alteration. The phenomenological experiences awakened many of the participants to know God more. As each session built on the other, it was evident that the participants were experiencing transformative change. The journal responses were heartfelt and indicated

heart changes. I was able to affirm transformative experiences in the focus group analysis as well.

Focus Group Analysis

Only one focus group was held, in which five people participated. When asking questions about head and heart knowledge, I received positive comments from a mix of people in the focus group. One person testified to experiencing the Trinity within themself and others; another commented that the distance is shorter between the head and heart as we grow. A person shared that during the class, memories they had lost after a stroke thirty-one years ago came back. This person witnessed visible change in others and their spiritual antenna now stood a little taller. Another participant shared an experience of a heart change. They described how good they were at putting themselves down, but after the keys class, they learned to stop putting themselves down.

These questions affirmed a new understanding of the difference and intersection between head and heart knowledge. The teaching on neuroplasticity, and the power of God to transform the mind, made a big impact on my participants. It was remarkable to hear how one of the participants regained memories from thirty-one years ago after suffering from a stroke! The awareness of negative self-talk caused a heart change of a participant to stop that behavior.

During the focus group discussion, I asked the question, “Does the science of neuroplasticity impact your beliefs on how God can help a person experience spiritual transformation?” Someone shared that this was a new concept for them, and they felt they were being changed. This person had blocked out memories which kept the person from

receiving healing. There was a consensus that new doors were being opened through the Spirit. For this person (and others), the teaching of neuroplasticity helped put a name to what some had experienced. This is what it is to experience God opening a new path to understanding and experiencing him and all the good things he desires to bring to us. Someone also shared they had become more aware and observant of God because of this class. This question indicated spiritual breakthrough and transformation in experiential knowledge of God.

The next question I asked was, "In remembering the prayer model, was it helpful in giving you insight into how God answers prayers?" One participant stated, "It was impactful, I am still processing." From analyzing participant responses, I gathered that the words shared during our prayer and ministry time were branded on my participants. They continued to recall the words they heard, which prompted in them the need to act. Another participant shared that it was a big step to go forward for personal prayer because they had never done that before. It helped them to deal with some hard things in their life, and after prayer time they experienced feelings of comfort and reassurance.

The last question I asked during this practicum was, "Were any of the discipleship methods helpful to you?" Many of the participants thought the discipleship diagrams were helpful in gaining new understanding. One mentioned they initially thought they were distracting, but they eventually found them to be helpful—the relationship triangle was most impactful. Participants declared they were spiritually impacted by the fellowship at the table; they felt empowered to reach for higher ideals in their Christian life and grow closer to God. It appears participants achieved a heightened spiritual awareness. I sensed a universally positive response from the participants in the class. One

person even said, “Honestly, I didn’t want to do this class, but I enjoyed each session and felt movement in my heart. I learned new things and I’ve grown. I’m glad I did it!”

In summary of the focus group conversation, I gathered that the participants experienced God in new ways that led to transformative change in the way they understand, relate to, and engage in a relationship with God. Their own responses testify to how God met them uniquely and personally on several occasions through being stretched and taken out of their comfort zones. New ways of understanding and awakening were unlocked. The participants also encountered the Lord through powerful prayer moments that resulted in healing, affirming, and commissioning for what would come next in their lives. The individual interviews also indicated transformative change.

Individual Interview Analysis

I interviewed three participants to gather more data. The questions I asked each person were: (1) Were you spiritually impacted because of this class? (2) Did you grow in experiential knowledge of God because of this class?; (3) Was there a particular teaching or experience that was meaningful for you?; and (4) Did the tools provided help you to better understand Scripture? Each interview provided valuable insight for the project.

I interviewed the first person three days after the completion of the class. Participant A1 shared that they were blessed by fellow believers and learned from others. The class provided another opportunity to grow closer to God. This participant is a visual learner. Accordingly, their favorite discipleship method was *Visio Divina*. During the exercise, they chose the “circle of people” figurine. This figurine depicted people in a circle connected and together. Participant A1 said that this was God’s reminder to them

that God has surrounded them with good people, family, and friends. A1 felt God was saying to stay connected. A1 shared that *Visio Divina*, the Learning Square, and the *4 Keys to Hearing God's Voice* activity were very impactful. A1 also found the teaching on the science of neuroplasticity very informative and fascinating. Lastly, participant A1 expressed that being in a group setting and together with small tables was very valuable to them.

Ten days following our last class, I interviewed participant A2. This participant shared they could physically feel the power of the Holy Spirit, and they received a physical touch from God. The participant stated they were "no longer defined by the fear of failure." A2 recalls that the idea of growing to become 1% better in one's faith and life journey was encouraging. A2 testified to growing in their experiential knowledge of God, and during the class, they felt closer to God and sensed that others were connecting with God as well. A2 also commented that the Sunday message each week and the special Lenten devotional helped them to make connections with the teachings presented in this project. A2 felt a closeness to God each morning while doing the devotional. They stated,

> I could feel the presence of the Spirit. Journal writing in response to what we experienced was impactful and responding in writing helped to clarify feelings and what God was doing at the time. We had a physical touch with God every Sunday, he was there. I grew in my relationship with him as a result. We were keyed in!

According to A2, the prayer time with Madeline and David was powerful and was the most impactful experience. A2 described feeling as if they were "lit on fire." They felt heat throughout their body, and this was the most powerful day because of feeling a connection to God. When this happened, participant A2 exclaimed, "The Lord is here! I want more!" A2 claims they experienced an overall new awareness, and many teachings

were meaningful. The ones that stood out were the Learning Square and *Lectio Divina*. They were good resources for hearing God's voice through his Word. The *4 Keys to Hearing God's Voice* activity helped them to get their momentum back with God.

A2 made a few more statements during the interview. A2 claimed they were able to view Scripture differently when it was shared in class, and that the teaching on neuroplasticity renewed their mind. This coursework was confirmation to A2 that the Holy Spirit was at work in them. They valued the experience of being in a group setting and the hands-on practicum each week. A2 said they would have liked more time with the *Visio Divina* method. They chose the Upper Room image, which left a big impact on them because they felt like they were at the table with Jesus. A2 was very appreciative of the class. A2 felt a sense of accomplishment after completing the class and wants more.

I conducted my last interview with participant A3 also ten days after we completed the classes. A3 shared that the first part of the class made them see things in a different way. The class helped them better understand the Trinity, and it gave them a greater awareness of God. As a result of the class, A3 sees things differently. They claimed their eyes are opened to see God in new ways. The most impactful practicum activity for A3 was *Visio Divina*. The participant chose the figurine of Jesus and the child. This object depicts Jesus and a child sharing a gaze as Jesus extends his hand to the child. A3 felt that they were the child in the figurine. Also, the eagle figurine spoke to A3's heart. They felt God's outstretched arms represented God's protection toward them, and God holding them.

A3 expressed that the prayer time with David and Madeline was powerful. The ministers shared things with them that no one knew. Participant A3 also felt the warmth

of the Holy Spirit and their knees went weak; they claimed the presence of God was strong. A3 came to know God more, and personally experience him. A3 said the Learning Triangle was also helpful because it revealed to them the need to spend more time with other believers.

In summary, all the interview participants enjoyed being in a group setting and felt the value of being with other believers. The *Visio Divina* discipleship method had a spiritual impact on all three of them. I interviewed participants A2 and A3 ten days after the class and I was impressed at how much the class still impacted them and how much they remembered. Participants A2 and A3 experienced moments of a powerful move of the Holy Spirit and they grew in both head and heart knowledge of God. All three participants gained an experiential knowledge of God that was transformative. It was disappointing that only three of the seventeen participants signed up for an interview. I sensed that once the class and journaling concluded, most participants were mentally worn out and ready to be done.

Pre- and Post-Questionnaires

The pre-questionnaires were given at the first class and indicated that all the participants experienced going to church; many were raised in a church. Some of the spiritual practices that connected them to the heart of God include prayer, singing, writing, reading, Sunday sermons, worship, daily devotionals, nature, communion, Bible studies, and fellowship. Participants shared that prayer is important for many reasons including: it connects them with God, is a lifeline to God, sustains them in difficult times, is one of the ways they feel God's presence, is a way to gain knowledge, and brings

peace and comfort. Participants shared they have seen evidence of God in various ways: through God working in the hearts of people, through the church's prayer drive-thru, and in the youth of the church.

Participants were asked how they wanted to grow in their experiential knowledge of God. Their responses included: I want to learn as much as I can to become as close as humanly possible to God so that he can direct my daily path; I hope to grow deeper in ways that I can express my faith to others—to feel more confident; I want to be prepared to experience meeting God. Others said: I am ready to push the envelope and to go after something new; I want to feel his presence in everything I do; I want to know that he is with me and not just be told that he is; I want to grow deeper and feel the power of the Holy Spirit; I want to surrender more; and I want to feel more like his actual presence is with me.

The responses in the post-questionnaires were provided at the conclusion of the last class. These indicated an increase in new practices that connected them to the heart of God. Both the *Lectio Divina* and *Visio Divina* discipleship tools were transformational for many of the participants because they helped them see and hear God in new ways. The Relationship Triangle and Learning Square were the most helpful of the diagrams because they provided a practical method to grow in their relationship with God. Participants grew in their awareness to become tuned into the presence of God and notice nudges from the Holy Spirit.

Participants experienced transformational prayer that helped them learn to hear God. One participant shared a spiritual revelation: "It's like he [God] is saying, 'Hey, I am here, and I am talking to you. You are not listening.' My perspective has changed,

and I feel called to do things differently." A different participant experienced a new awareness stating, "Prayer can be done in more than one way. Prayer can be listening as well as talking."

Verification of God working was evident in the teachings and practicums. The science of neuroplasticity was validation that God can spiritually and physically transform the human mind. Participants shared powerful testimonies of their experience. One participant described a detailed vision they had of the presence of the Father's love. They wrote: "Picturing Jesus with me. I saw him kneeling next to me while I was in prayer, taking my hand and calling me beloved." Another person embraced vulnerability and experienced breakthrough. They shared, "After being prayed for, I first had an experience of letting others see inside me, sharing deep emotions that I hide. It has allowed me to feel the love of others. I have felt cared for like I can't ever remember feeling." A participant experienced healing during prayer time: "The prayer and laying on of hands. I could feel the healing moving through my body." One participant struggled with self-worth and received the love of the Father. They stated, "Just learning that I am worthy of him has been a tremendous help."

Participants grew in experiential knowledge from the beginning of the class until the end. Many even experienced a new awareness by observing what God was doing in others. One person commented, "I'm so very thankful for this class. Not only did I mature in my faith, I also witnessed many in the group who were moved to tears because of their awakening in the Holy Spirit." Analysis of data leads me to conclude that the methods this project employed unlocked spiritual breakthroughs. A participant agreed and stated, "Most definitely, but it's just a start to practice the methods and find what

works for me. I hope to make a habit of using one or more to give me meaning to my relationship with God."

Lastly, the title of the class, "Keys to Unlock Your Relationship with God," even resonated with and impacted the participants. A few participants shared this. "I felt like more than one door was opened. I feel a spiritual awakening and a new way to approach God and how to pray," one participant said. Another shared, "I feel I have learned different things to try that I haven't felt before. I feel like if I make them part of my daily life that I will grow with God." The fellowship that occurred at the tables fostered spiritual growth: "the chats and thinking about experiencing God is different ways has opened my mind to new things." Some participants completed the coursework with a greater awareness of the presence of God: "Sometimes I can feel God's presence with me. When I open my heart to God my life is so much better. I feel he is there for me, and I can talk to him more."

Overall Feedback

Overall, the feedback from the class was positive. Many offered thanks for offering the class and how much they learned and grew in their relationship with God. The data collection methods were insightful, and it was encouraging to see how the participants engaged with the material. My questionnaires indicated that many had transformational encounters and gained experiential knowledge of God. All the participants were "churched," yet they had not experienced the power and presence of God in the ways they did in the class coursework of this project. After engaging with the teaching and practicums, participants left with a greater personal knowledge of God and

many experienced transformational encounters with God. Many came to know God more because of the project. The graph in figure 4 illustrates the participants' self-expression of experiencing God in new ways throughout the weeks of this project.

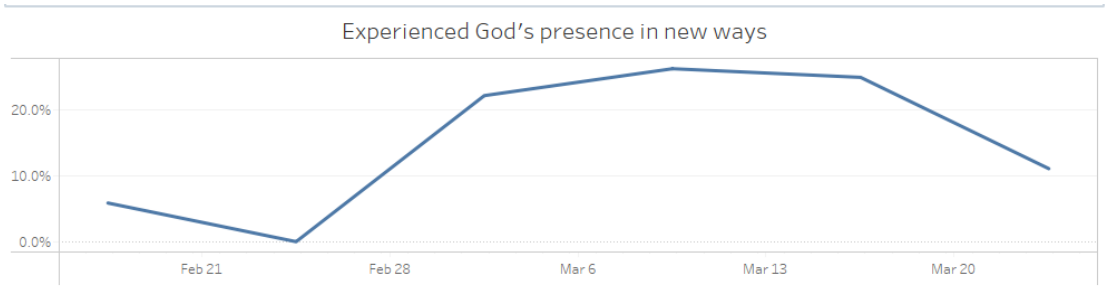


Figure 4. Experiencing God's Presence in New Ways

The chart in figure 5 illustrates participants' self-expressed growth based on participant responses to questions before and after the course. This data of change indicators is based on key words that were highlighted from a database of all participant responses. These keywords include: "learning," "grow," "method," "knowledge," "experience," "closer," and "unlock." For example, if a participant expressed through their post-questionnaire that they became closer to God, their answer was recorded as a positive indicator of change because their response was flagged for containing the word "closer." It is evidenced by the chart that participants believed they experienced growth.

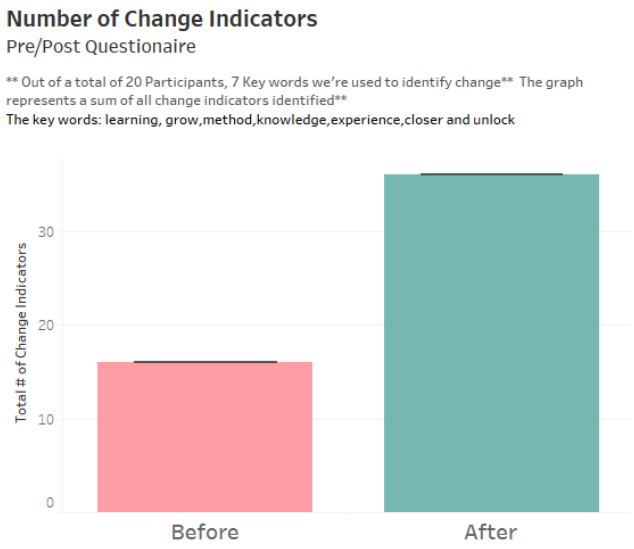

Number of Change Indicators
Pre/Post Questionaire
** Out of a total of 20 Participants, 7 Key words we're used to identify change** The graph represents a sum of all change indicators identified**
The key words: learning, grow,method,knowledge,experience,closer and unlock
Total # of Change Indicators
30
20
10
0
Before
After

Figure 5. Key Word Change Indicators

Conclusion

In the first chapter of Ephesians, the Apostle Paul reveals what is available to all believers in Christ. In his prayer, he asks God to give believers the Spirit of wisdom and revelation to know him better, and for the eyes of the believers' hearts to be enlightened to know the hope, inheritance, and great power available for those who believe. Many believers are unaware that God still imparts wisdom, revelation, and great power to believers today to know him more. In the church, there has often been an absence of understanding the presence and empowerment of God. Many embody a spirit of "doing for God" and miss out on "doing with God." My call to the doctoral program came out of my own transformative encounter with the Holy Spirit and a desire for others to experience the power and presence of God; to know him more.

As a pastor and spiritual leader, I have grown in my relationship with God because of this class. I stepped into unchartered spiritual territory, took risks, and walked

through new doors to lead others into personal encounters with God. It was as transformational for me as it was for the participants. I look forward to seeing what fruit will come from the class. I expect that many of my participants will continue to experience spiritual growth. I also look forward to what God will do within the Lindenwald church. It is a privilege to walk beside the congregation as we encounter God together and grow his Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

As Methodists and theological descendants of John Wesley, many in my congregation are unfamiliar with our denomination's rich charismatic roots. Wesley's Aldersgate experience is widely known in the history of the church as the moment Wesley felt his heart strangely warmed and his salvation assured. Although this is important, there is much more. His testimony stands as an example for my church and this project.

Wesley sought more of God, and his Fetter Lane encounter radically transformed his personal understanding of and experience with God. It pushed Wesley to know God for himself as the Holy Spirit fell mightily on him. The participants in this project confirmed they had not heard of Wesley's Fetter Lane experience and had no knowledge of what an encounter with the Holy Spirit is. Many believers in my church have settled for no experiential knowledge (or assurance at all), thus missing out on the dynamic empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

The gospel of Christ is meant to be witnessed, heard, and experienced. Cessationists believe that the spiritual gifts ceased with the apostles. In John 14, Jesus reminds us that whoever believes in him will do even greater things because he is going to the Father. In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, Paul shares what is possible for those who

believe because of the gospel. Paul was saying the same thing this project sought to demonstrate—that it is when the head and heart connect, and God's Spirit personally meets a believer with revelation and encounter, that one can fully embrace the spiritual possibilities that are available to all.

The purpose of this project and creation of this coursework was to give believers an experience with the power and presence of God for themselves and know God more intimately. The teachings were grounded in research explained in the foundation papers. The teaching on Ephesians, neuroplasticity, pneumatology, and John Wesley's Fetter Lane experience all provided credibility to what the participants would experience in the practicum part of the class. The practicums provided methods by which participants could and did encounter the heart of God, and, as a result, they grew in experiential knowledge of God.

Each participant was affected in different ways. Some felt the powerful touch of the Holy Spirit while others sensed the warmth of his love. Many learned new keys or methods for unlocking a closer relationship with God—methods that opened doors to awakening and knowing God more. I was humbled to see visible changes in the participants. They indeed grew into a new awareness of God through both head and heart knowledge. Many of them personally thanked me for offering the class.

One of the outcomes I had not anticipated was the new relationships that formed because of the class. I was hesitant to include discussion segments at each table because of the nature of the content. I did not want to make anyone feel uncomfortable. Yet, I noticed in the first session that people began to share naturally, so I adjusted my material to add more discussion questions to latter sessions of the class. Throughout all the data

collection methods, participants expressed the value of being in community with others, sharing experiences, and the importance of being in fellowship with other believers. The figure 6 graph illustrates their opinion on the importance of community and fellowship and the impact it made spiritually.

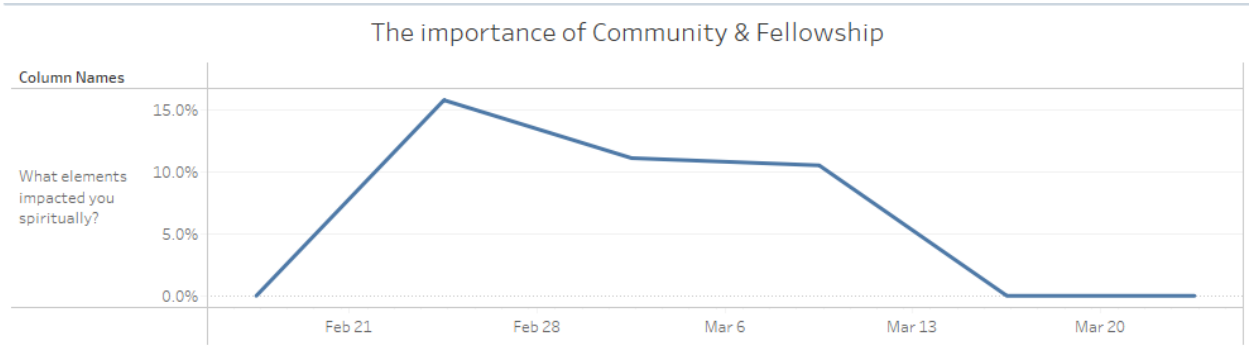


Figure 6. Importance of Community and Fellowship

This project tested a theory that if a person engages in a six-week transformative discipleship process, participants will move from a theoretical knowledge of God to an experiential knowledge of God. The project demonstrated that the "Keys to Unlock Your Relationship with God" class was effective in bringing the participants into encounters with God through teaching, Scripture, images (objects), prayer, discipleship shapes (diagrams), and tools to know God more. The results from the class validate my original hypothesis. Almost all participants grew in experiential knowledge of God. Several had a life-changing experience, many experienced an awakening, and most sensed a touch from God. Participants learned new discipleship methods that will serve as building blocks for continued spiritual growth. All participants received a greater awareness of the activity of the Holy Spirit, either through experiencing the Spirit for themselves, or by witnessing the Spirit's activity in others.

As I look for the future, I will continue to offer new opportunities for participants and members of the church to grow deeper in their experience knowledge of God. I plan to offer the class again to new participants in my church. The class could also be used as a discipleship training model for leaders. I will present the crux of my project to my local Global Methodist District Presiding Elder to see how it might be of benefit in area churches. My prayer is that God would continue to bless the work of the project as it is intended for his children to know him more.

APPENDIX A

PRE–QUESTIONNAIRE QUESTIONS

1. Describe your experiential knowledge of God.

2. What spiritual practices connect you to the heart of God?

3. Why is prayer important to you?

4. Where do you see evidence of God currently working in your life?

APPENDIX B

POST–QUESTIONNAIRE QUESTIONS

1. Describe your experiential knowledge of God.
2. Did any of the new spiritual practices you participated in help you connect to the heart of God in new ways? Please explain why or why not.
3. What did you discover about prayer?
4. Was there any component of this coursework that helped you connect to God in a meaningful way? If so, please describe what happened.
5. In what ways do you now or still want to grow in your experiential knowledge of God?

APPENDIX C

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Were you spiritually impacted because of this class? If so, how?
2. Did you grow in experiential knowledge of God because of this class? If yes, please explain how.
3. Was there a particular teaching or experience that was meaningful to you? If so, please share.
4. Did the tools provided help you to better understand Scripture? If yes, please explain how.

APPENDIX D

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. To you, what is the difference between head knowledge and heart knowledge?
2. Based on the differences between head and heart knowledge, did you experience any change because of these classes?
3. Does the science of neuroplasticity impact your beliefs on how God can help a people experience spiritual transformation?
4. As you recall the prayer model, was it helpful to give you insight into how God answers prayers? If so, share why it was helpful.
5. Were any of the discipleship methods helpful to you? If so, share which ones and why they were helpful.

APPENDIX E

WEEKLY JOURNAL QUESTIONS

1. What stood out to you the most and why?

2. What elements impacted you spiritually?

3. Did you experience God in new ways? What elements impacted you spiritually?

4. Did any of the teaching or methods help you grow in experiential knowledge of God?

APPENDIX F

PARTICIPANT SURVEY

I want to learn more about:
(check all that apply)

- ☐ The Bible/Scripture
- ☐ Holy Spirit
- ☐ Prophecy
- ☐ Healing
- ☐ Discipleship Methods
- ☐ Devotional Practices
- ☐ Hearing God's Voice
- ☐ Dream Interpretation
- ☐ Spiritual Gifts
- ☐ Prayer
- ☐ Other (please explain)

_____

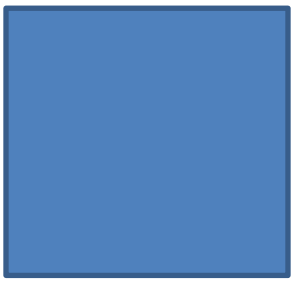
APPENDIX G

LEARNING SQUARE

Purpose: This shape illustrates the various stages of learning. By using it, we can personally identify where we are in the process of learning something about God or in the ministry. The goal is to become 1% better. Components: D1, D2, D3, and D4.

D1 (unaware)

D4 (comes naturally)



D2 (new awareness)

D3 (awareness and growing)

Sample Scripture: John 2:1–11, The Wedding at Cana. In Cana, the disciples' eyes were opened to who Jesus was. This was a D2 moment.

Follow-up questions:

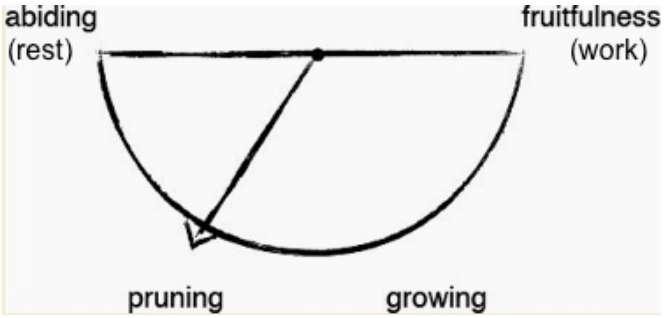
1. Do you think Jesus' disciples progressed in their learning in the same way? Is this encouraging to you? How so?
2. How have your eyes been opened like the disciples' to a new understanding?
3. Where do you want to grow in your faith and understanding of God?
4. What is God saying to you? What are you going to do about it?

Adapted from: *Building a Discipleship Culture* by Mike Breen.

APPENDIX H

RHYTHYMS OF LIFE SEMI-CIRCLE

Purpose: The semi-circle illustrates the pendulum of a disciple's life. This helps to identify patterns and a spiritual rhythm. It encourages the disciple to aim for a balance between rest and work. The aim is to become 1% better. Components: abiding, fruitfulness, pruning, and growing.



Sample Scripture: Mark 6:30-32. The patterns Jesus taught his disciples. Spiritual disciplines are an important part of one's spiritual growth.

Follow-up questions:

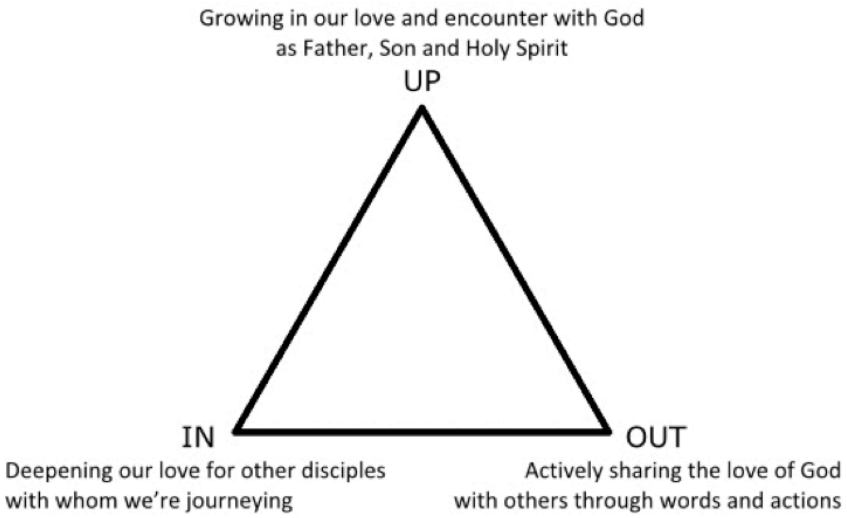
1. Where is the pendulum today in your life?
2. Share spiritual disciplines you engage in. What are the ones that are most meaningful?
3. How does finding time to rest and abide with Christ help to fuel your work?
4. What do you need to prune to grow?
5. What changes will you make to be available to abide with Christ and find a better rhythm between work and rest?

Adapted from*: Building a Discipleship Culture* by Mike Breen.

APPENDIX I

RELATIONSHIP TRIANGLE

Purpose: The relationship triangle is a Christian diagram representing three aspects of relationships. The "up" is how one grows in their relationship with Christ. The "in" and "out" represent a dichotomy between developing depth of relationship with others on the same journey (inside the church) versus sharing the love of Christ through relationship with others (outside the church). Components: Up—worship and relationship with God; In—fellowship with other believers; and Out—ministry outside the church.


Growing in our love and encounter with God
as Father, Son and Holy Spirit
UP
IN
OUT
Deepening our love for other disciples
with whom we're journeying
Actively sharing the love of God
with others through words and actions

Sample Scripture: Matthew 17:1–21, The Transfiguration. Up = the Father; In = community with other believers; and Out = ministry to others.

Follow-up questions:

1. Describe what that Up moment must have been like for those who were there with Jesus.
2. Look at the components of the triangle and rate your up, in, and out from 1-10
3. What is an area that you would like increase? How can you get 1% better?

4. What is your plan to find more balance in your worship of God, relationship with other believers and mission outside the church?
5. What are sensing God is telling you?

Adapted from*: Building a Discipleship Culture* by Mike Breen.

APPENDIX J

LECTIO DIVINA

The leader brings a photocopy of a passage of Scripture and distributes copies to participants. Participants listen while the host reads it through one time aloud. Host reads the same passage aloud a second time and asks participants to underline what stands out to them. Host reads the Scripture passage aloud a third time and asks participants to circle what God is saying to them.

Adapted from: https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/253799/1-What-is-Lectio-Divina.pdf.

APPENDIX K

VISIO DIVINA

Select an object or two and consider the following questions:

1. What emotions does this image evoke in you?
2. What else does this image stir in you or bring forth in you?
3. Notice if there is a place on the object where your eye is invited to linger.

   Contemplate why that may be.
4. Is there a certain detail or color that stands out to you?

Leader prays a prayer of illumination for God to reveal himself to the participants through the objects they chose. Participants return to the object tables a second time to pick an object and repeat the task. Leader encourages participants to ask God what he is saying to them through the object(s).

Adapted from Janice MacLean – *The* Prayer Bench – www.prayerbench.ca.

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